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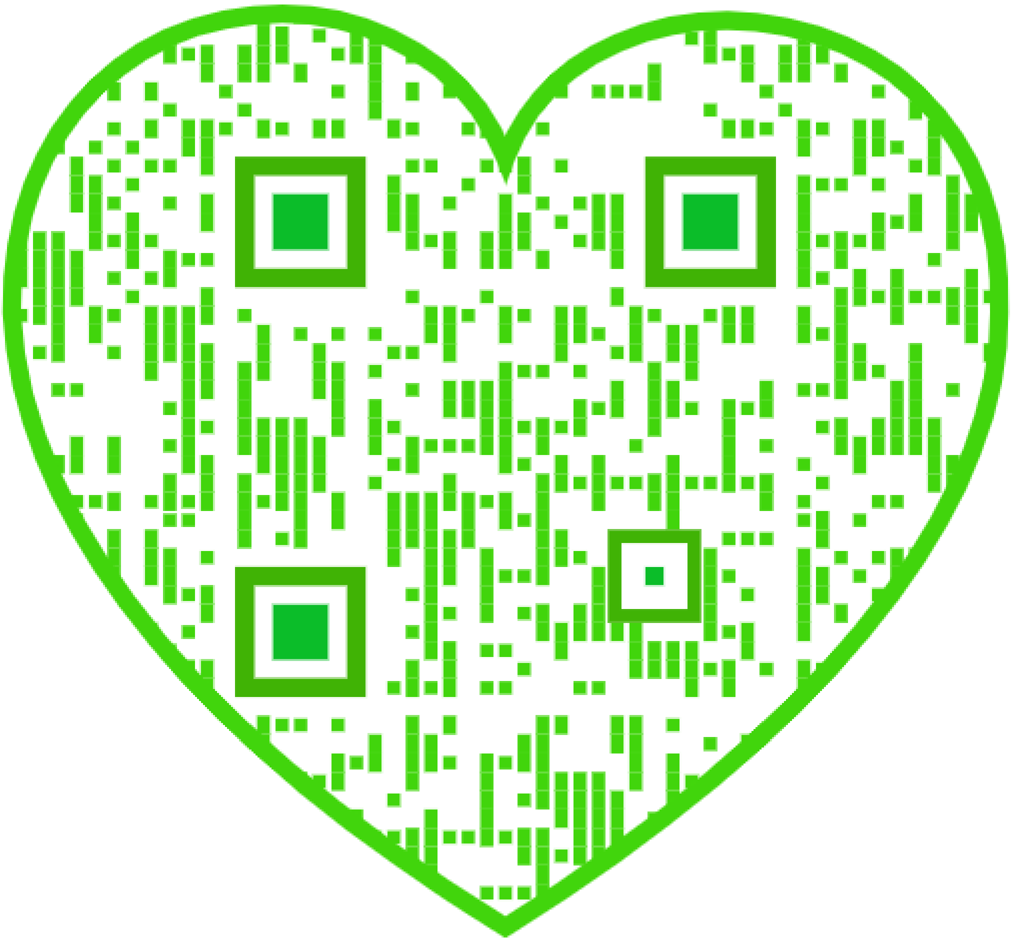

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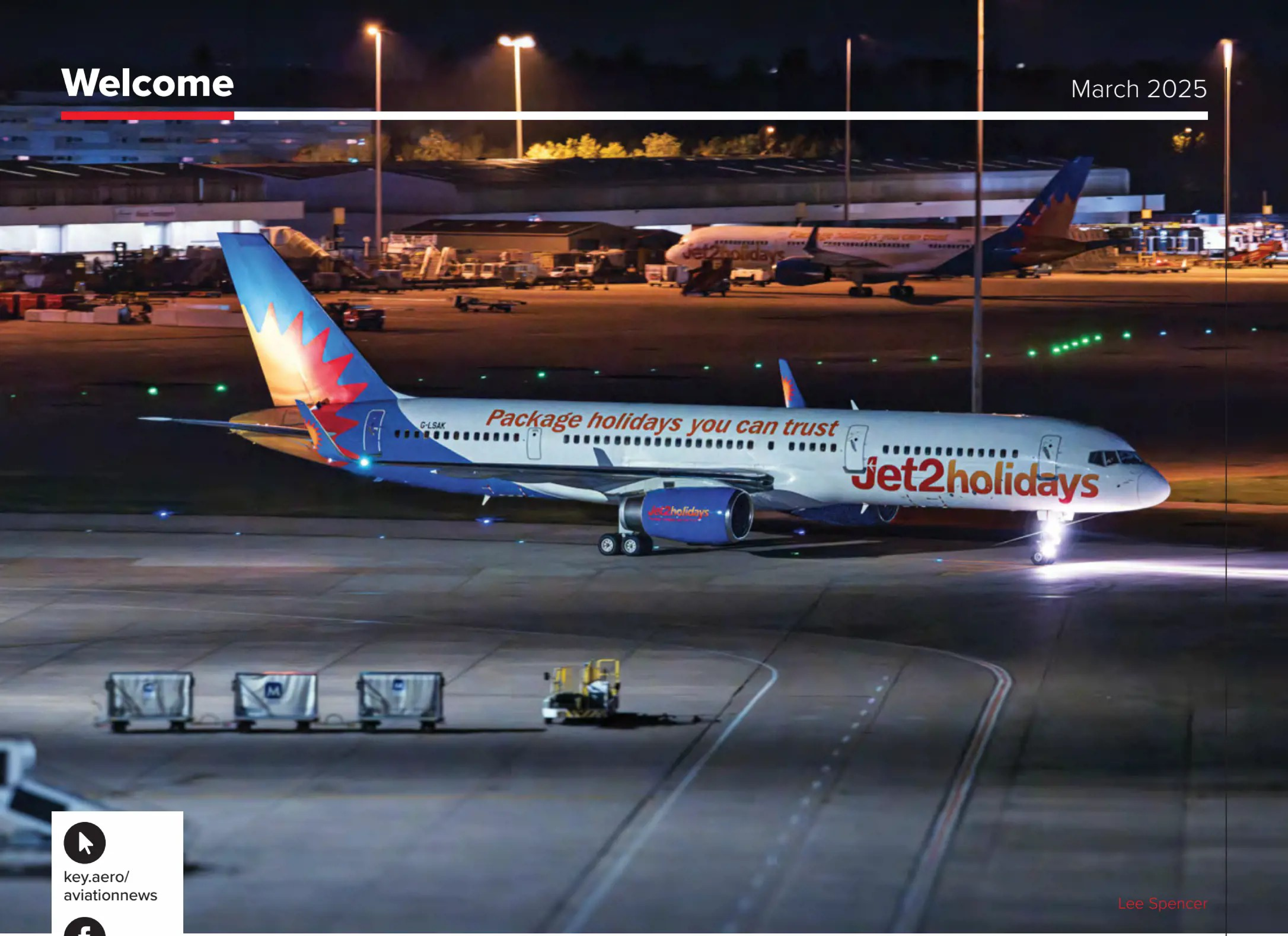

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FAREWELL TO EVERYONE'S FAVOURITE: THE 757
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On the cover

A U.S. Marine Corps AV-8B Harrier with Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 365 (Reinforced), 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), prepares to land aboard the USS Wasp (LHD 1) while underway in the Atlantic Ocean.
USMC/ by Lance Cpl. John Allen

Welcome

After just one month, 2025 will be imprinted in commercial aviation history. On January 28, the first human-piloted civil supersonic flight since Concorde's retirement in 2003 took place, with XB-1 of Boom Supersonic breaking the sound barrier above the Mojave Desert in California – the same desert Chuck Yeager flew over in 1947 when he made aviation history. Has this milestone taken us a step closer to the potential return of supersonic commercial travel? The debate for a third runway at Heathrow also continues with the Chancellor of the Exchequer saying the UK government backed the development and is inviting proposals to be brought forward by the summer.

In the military world, significant amounts of orders were being placed over the seasonal period and early Janaury, with new Eurofighters for Spain and Italy. A range of orders for the Embraer KC-390 Millennium and the A-29 Super Tucano were placed and multiple platforms ordered to train future Canadian Air Force pilots. After orders come deliveries and the first month of 2025 saw deliveries such as the handover of the first UAE Dassault Rafale F4 and the first Bulgarian Lockheed Martin F-16 Block 70.

In the UK, Draken received a new contract to continue providing training services to the MOD, such as simulated missile attacks, electronic warfare and air-to-air combat.

Also in January, we said farewell to a loyal servant to the UK travel industry both from a consumer and operator perspective. The 757 soared into the skies as a UK-registered commercial airliner for one last time in Jet2 colours, marking the end of an era for the type. We run through the type's 40 years of service. In other features, we look back at the amazing career of G-BDDG, which now sits proudly at Brooklands Air Museum. Speaking of classics, but with a bit of a modern twist, we visit Bell Geospace at Newquay Airport operating a unique platform to carry out a mission that is just as unique. Other features include firefighting with the Black Hawk helicopter and flying with Italy's boutique airline, SkyAlps. I hope you enjoy this issue.

Joe

Joe Campion, Editor

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British airways

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Main image : **A wonderful study of 'Delta-Golf' in the wild blue yonder captured by Donald Huebler during a test flight from Fairford on February 21, 1975 – note the black-and-white flight test photographic calibration markings** National Archives And Records Administration

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Boom's XB-1 breaks the sound barrier

XB-1
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N990XB

N990XB making history as the first US commercial designed aircraft to go supersonic. Boom

Boom Technology's quest to bring back faster-than-sound passenger transport took a significant leap forward on January 28, 2025, with the first human-piloted civil supersonic flight since Concorde's retirement in 2003. The company's XB-1 technology demonstrator broke the sound barrier for the first time during Flight 12 of its test programme. The XB-1 was flown by the company's chief test pilot, Tristan 'Geppetto' Brandenburg, operating from the Mojave Air & Space Port in California.

The aircraft was positioned for its supersonic run in the Black Mountain Supersonic Corridor at 35,290ft, followed by Dassault Mirage F1 and Northrop T-38 Talon chase jets. The XB-1 achieved a maximum of Mach 1.122 around 11 minutes 30 seconds into the flight. It landed back at Mojave after being airborne for 34 minutes.

Speaking after the flight, Brandenburg said: "It has been a privilege and a highlight of my career to be a part of the team that achieved this milestone – every single member of this team was critical to our success. Our discipline and methodical approach to this flight test programme created the safety culture that made a safe and successful first supersonic flight possible. With the lessons learned from XB-1, we can continue to build the future of supersonic travel."

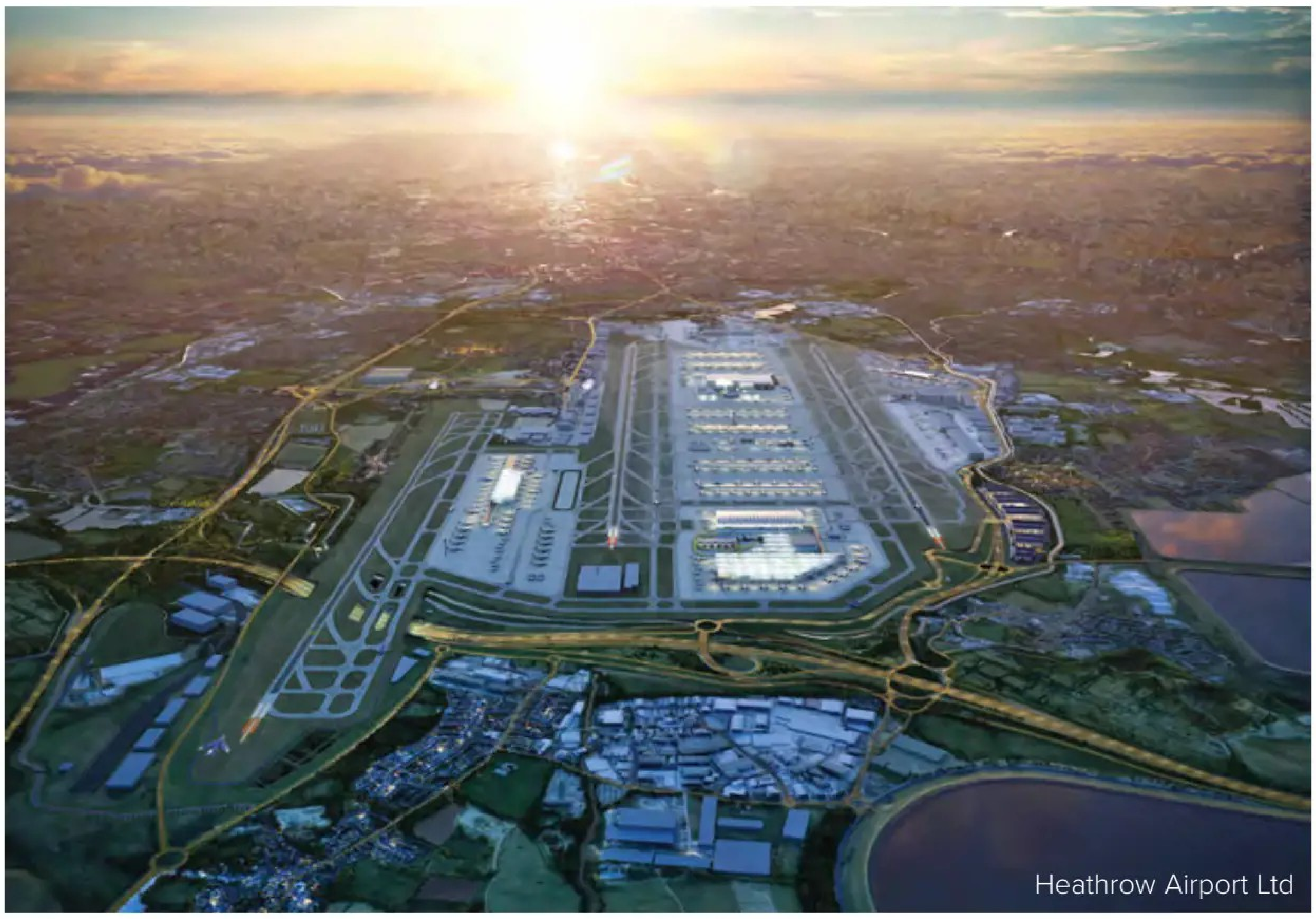
The event was livestreamed by the company, hosted by Mike Bannister, the former Concorde chief pilot for British Airways. By David Willis

Heathrow's 3rd runway

In a wide-ranging speech on January 29, 2025, aimed at boosting the UK economy, Chancellor of the Exchequer Rachel Reeves said the government backed the development of a third runway at London/Heathrow Airport.

Reeves said: "I can confirm today that this government supports a third runway at Heathrow. I have always been clear that a third runway would unlock further growth, boost investment, increase exports and make the UK more open and more connected."

Reeves said the UK government is inviting proposals to be brought forward by the summer: "We will then take forward a full assessment through the Airport National Policy Statement. It will ensure that a third runway is delivered in line with our legal, environmental and climate obligations. Heathrow are clear that their proposal for expansion will meet strict rules on noise, air quality and carbon emissions."



Heathrow Airport Ltd

Reeves said the new runway could create more than 100,000 jobs. Three-quarters of long-haul flights from the UK depart from Heathrow and the airport handles more than 60% of the UK's air freight. According to UK Civil Aviation Authority, Heathrow handled 83.4 million passengers up to the end of November 2024.

Heathrow chief executive officer Thomas Woldbye welcomed Reeves's declaration as "recognition of the critical role we play for the economy and in delivering growth across the UK. A third runway and the infrastructure that comes with it would unlock billions of pounds of private money to stimulate the UK supply chain during construction. Once built, it would create jobs and drive trade, tourism and inward investment to every part of the country. It would also give airlines and passengers the competitive, resilient hub airport they expect... With strict environmental safeguards, it would demonstrate that by growing our economy responsibly we can ensure our commitments to future generations are delivered."

Mark Broadbent and Dino Carrara

MAX 10 for Pegasus

ISTANBUL-BASED PEGASUS Airlines has placed the largest order in its history for 100 Boeing 737 MAX 10s, with options for up to 100 more of the type. Based on list prices, the total order is valued at $36bn, with deliveries scheduled from 2028. The deal increases the MAX 10 backlog to 1,200 aircraft, with type certification from the Federal Aviation Administration still to be secured. The aircraft is expected to help the Turkish low-cost carrier reach new markets across Europe, the Middle East, Central Asia and Africa.

CEO Güliz Öztürk said: “We are working tirelessly to reach new record highs and do our part for Turkey to achieve the targeted 100 million visitors and $100bn in revenue in tourism. We will evaluate converting the remaining 100 aircraft options into firm orders in the coming years based on market conditions and the needs of our fleet. Boeing aircraft have been an integral part of our operations since [we] entered the aviation industry in 1990.”

The Seattle-based manufacturer claim the aircraft can carry up to 230 passengers with a range of up to 3,100nm while reducing fuel use and emissions by 20% compared to the aircraft it replaces. Stephanie Pope, president and CEO of Boeing Commercial Airplanes, said: “We have been a proud partner since the inception of Pegasus, and we are excited to welcome them as the newest 737 MAX customer. We look forward to delivering on its promise of greater efficiency, versatility and reliability.”

Pegasus currently has a fleet of 118 aircraft, comprising 52 Airbus A320s, 57 A321s and nine Boeing 737-800s, and already has an existing order for A321neos being delivered through to 2029.

Boeing

Further development for Global A380

HiFly

AIRBUS A380-841 9H-GLOBL (msn 120) arrived at MESA - Maintenance & Engineering at Beja Airport in Portugal on January 17, 2025, as preparations continue for the aircraft’s service entry with UK start-up Global Airlines. Portuguese operator Hi Fly ferried the A380 to Beja from Dresden in Germany, where EFW had completed heavy maintenance work on the aircraft.

A MESA statement said: “The A380 will undergo routine maintenance, as well as cabin improvements, during its time in Portugal, before starting commercial operations [with Global Airlines].” MESA will also assist with applying a unique livery to the A380’s fuselage.

James Asquith, founder and CEO of Global Airlines, said: “We want our first A380 to be well cared for as she takes the final steps towards commercial operations in 2025. MESA is now a fundamental part of that journey.”

Airbus closes BelugaST operation

3
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Thomas Haynes

IN LATE January, Airbus confirmed that it will close its Beluga Transport (AiBT) operation. Its fleet of four A300-600ST Beluga aircraft was previously used by the manufacturing giant to transport aircraft parts between its facilities within Europe.

Since the introduction of the newer and larger A330-700L BelugaXL fleet to carry the companies A350 wings, and with plenty of life left in the ST fleet, Airbus envisioned creating a transport operation with the BelugaST carrying outsized cargo for external clients worldwide.

AiBT only gathered its own Air Operators Certificate (AOC) in November 2023, but 14 months later, the cargo airline and its operation have been drawn to a close. An Airbus spokesperson said: "We confirm that the decision has been taken to terminate the AiBT business for outsized cargo missions. All flights operated by the BelugaST fleet are now suspended."

There has been no official confirmation of why AiBT operations have ceased, but many reports state that it is for economic reasons. Airbus has simply stated: “It is a standard governance for Airbus to frequently review the business performance of an affiliate together with the management, address structural losses, propose alternative solutions and take the necessary decision to protect its employees and assets while also remaining transparent towards its customers. Overall air freight demand is still high as disclosed in our 2024 Global Market Forecast for the next 20 years. We’ve seen some activities that have shifted to sea transport though. Overall, the cargo market development is not the reason for AiBT to close its business as operational issues were the biggest challenge.”

Riyadh Air receives first Dreamliner

RIYADH AIR
طيران الرياض
HZ-RXX

Riyadh Air

RIYADH AIR’S first 787-9 Dreamliner arrived at King Khalid International Airport in Saudi Arabia on January 13. HZ-RXX is a technical spare leased from Oman Air and is wearing the ‘splendid pearl’ livery. The leased aircraft is an addition to Riyadh Air’s original order of 72 787-9 Dreamliners.

The airline stated that HZ-RXX will be used for pilot and crew training over the next few months. It will also be used to support the airline’s Air Operator Certificate (AOC) process with the General Authority of Civil Aviation (GACA). After this, the aircraft will act as a technical spare when the airline commences service later this year with the expected first two 787-9s.

US government sues Southwest

Aviation News

SOUTHWEST AIRLINES is being sued by the US Department of Transportation (DOT) for operating several "chronically delayed flights", violating the Federal Aviation Act and DOT regulations. The suit was filed with the United States District Court for the Northern District of California on January 15. Frontier Airlines was also fined $650,000 for the same reason on the same day. This followed JetBlue's $2m fine on January 3 for operating 145 chronically delayed flights between June 2022 and November 2023.

According to the DOT, a chronically delayed flight is one that has operated at least ten times per month and arrives 30 minutes late or more more than 50% of the time. The Southwest flights in question – WN1767 between Chicago/O'Hare and Oakland and WN2556 between Baltimore and Cleveland/Hopkins – took place between April and July 2022. During this period, flight WN1767 was delayed on average from 69 to 87 minutes, while WN2556 had average monthly delays of up to 96 minutes. The DOT found that Southwest was responsible for the disruption on these routes more than 90% of the time.

US transportation secretary Pete Buttigieg said: "As part of our commitment to supporting passenger rights and fairness in the market for airline travel, we are suing Southwest Airlines for disrupting passengers' travel with unlawful chronic flight delays. Airlines have a legal obligation to ensure that their flight schedules provide travellers with realistic departure and arrival times. Today's action sends a message to all airlines that the DOT is prepared to go to court in order to enforce passenger protections."

Meanwhile, the Dallas/Love Field-based carrier has agreed to a sale-leaseback agreement with the US lessor Babcock & Brown Aircraft Management. The deal involves 36 of its Boeing 737-800s and is expected to generate $871m for the airline.

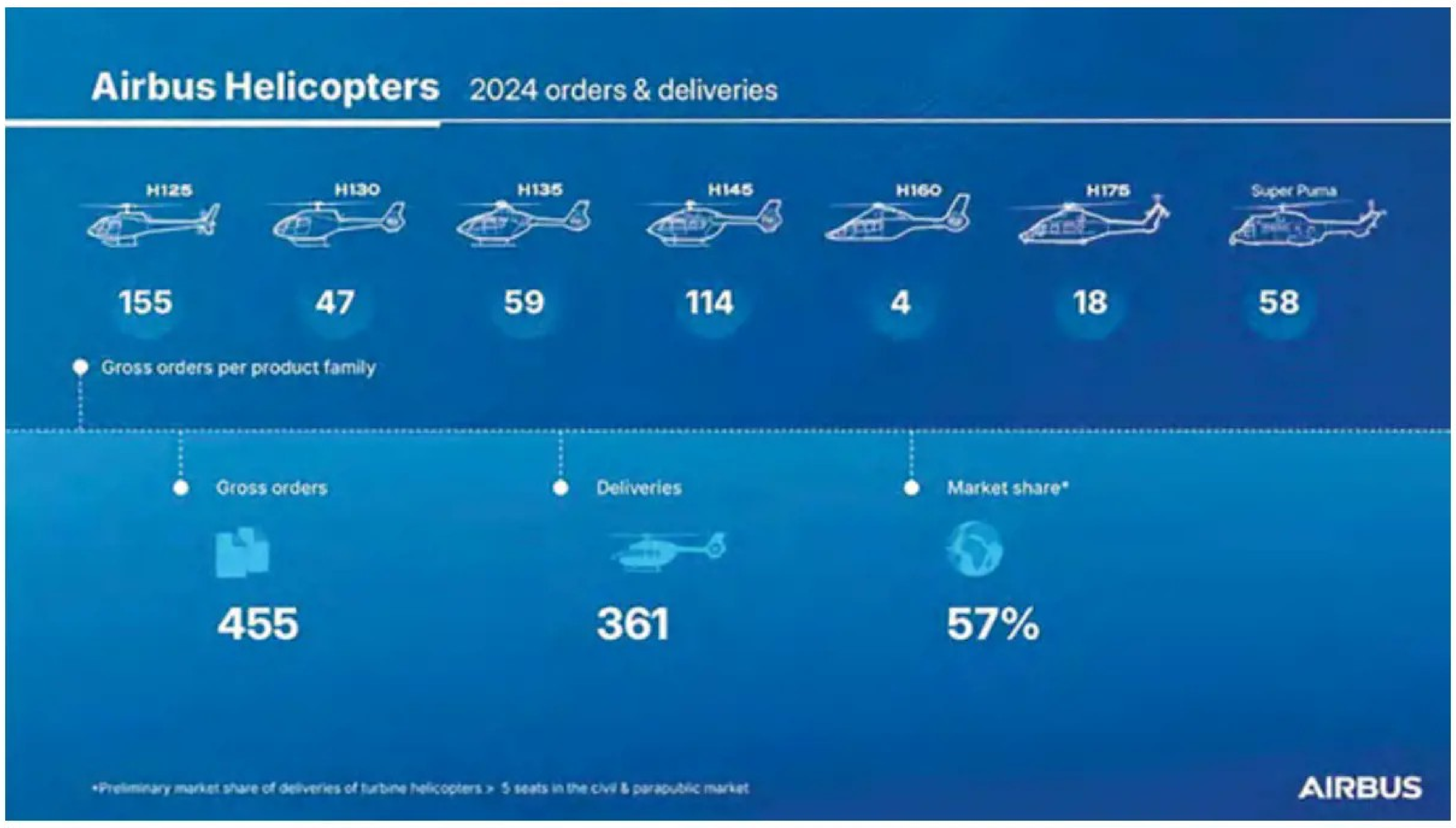
EasyJet paints by numbers

easyJet

EASYJET HAS become the first airline to trial a new state-of-the-art lower-weight paint, which will enable it to make fuel savings. In conjunction with Mankiewicz Aviation Coatings, the Luton-based carrier has developed a new system that reduces the amount of paint needed to create its livery. The process has been applied to 38 aircraft and will be rolled out across the entire fleet by 2030. It saves 27kg of paint per aircraft and is expected to save 3.6 tonnes of fuel and 11.3 tonnes of CO2 emissions per aircraft based on 1,800 sectors flown per year. Across the entire fleet this should account for a 1,296-tonne fuel reduction, equivalent to a 4,095 tonne reduction of carbon emissions.

This is one of several incremental steps the airline said it is taking to reduce the weight of its aircraft and one of many initiatives it is using to reduce emissions and fuel burn. Lahiru Ranasinghe, director of sustainability at easyJet, said: "While this forms a small part of a bigger strategy, [it] exemplifies how we're assessing every single part of our operation to find efficiency gains to help us achieve this mission."

Airbus Helicopters orders keep growing



Airbus Helicopters announced on January 27 that it had logged 455 gross orders in 2024. The orders came from 182 customers in 42 countries. CEO Bruno Even said: "Airbus Helicopters' order intake in 2024, with an increase bordering 10% in units for the second year in a row, highlights its stable growth in a complex global environment."

Titan to operate for BA Euroflyer

Titan Airways

UK BASED charter airline Titan Airways announced on January 23 that it was pleased to share that "we will shortly be starting flight operations for BA EuroFlyer." Titan will be providing the UK's national flag carrier with aircraft, crew, maintenance insurance (ACMI) capacity from London Gatwick with two of its aircraft. The first is contracted from February 1 to November 2, 2025, and the second from March 1 to June 2, 2025. Both contracts are wet lease arrangements with Titan providing both flight deck and cabin crew and will mainly be operated by A320 and A321ceos.

NEWS IN BRIEF

LUFTHANSA GROUP has ordered another five Airbus A350-1000s, taking its overall commitment to 15 of the type, to be delivered between 2028 and 2030. All will be powered by Rolls-Royce Trent XWB-97 engines. Its initial order of ten, made in March 2024, is scheduled for delivery from April 2026.

RYANAIR EXPECTS to receive up to 29 737 MAX 8-200s from Boeing in 2025 after accepting 36 last year. It says the aircraft will be allocated to countries where aviation growth is stimulated, citing Sweden, Italy, Spain and Poland, and the extra capacity should enable it to carry 210 million passengers this year. The Irish budget carrier has 38 MAX 8-200s on order, plus 150 yet-to-be-certified MAX 10s scheduled for delivery in 2027.

THE FIRST Austrian Airlines 777-200ER equipped with the AeroSHARK surface technology re-entered service on January 13 between Bangkok and Vienna. The 23-year-old OE-LPC (c/n 29313) received 830m2 of the 50-micrometre thick riblet film developed by Lufthansa Technik and BASF, which the airline said saves 1% on fuel consumption per flight. Three more 777s will be modified by March.

TAIWAN'S STARLUX Airlines placed a firm order with Airbus for five more A350Fs in early January. This doubles Starlux's initial order of the freight variant of the A350 placed last year. "The cargo market is set to become a key element in our business model and will benefit from the advantages offered by Taiwan's geographical location," said STARLUX CEO Glenn Chai. "The A350F is the perfect choice for STARLUX, offering a similar payload-range capability as previous generation freighters, but with very significant reductions in fuel consumption and carbon emissions."

BRITTEN-NORMAN has signed a letter of intent (LOI) with Evie Aero for 15 new BN-2 Islanders. Delivery is scheduled to commence at the beginning of 2027 with each airframe scheduled for later conversion to zero-emissions hydrogen fuel-cell propulsion systems being designed by Cranfield Aerospace Solutions (CAeS) as part of Project Fresson. The collaboration between the Lee-on-Solent-based manufacturer and the German airline includes a redesign of the Islander's interior to increase "passenger comfort and functionality, as well as ensuring compatibility with sustainable aviation technologies."

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RAF heads to Ex Red Flag 25-1

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EIGHT EUROFIGHTER Typhoon FGR4s from 6 Squadron based at RAF Lossiemouth took part in one of the world's toughest training exercises between January 27 and February 14 at Nellis Air Force Base in the US.

Exercise Red Flag, this year celebrating 50 years of existence, saw RAF personnel participating not only from 6 Squadron, but also RC-135 Rivet Joint aircrew from 51 Sqn, air operations controllers and a Voyager aircraft from 10 Sqn and 101 Sqn. This is the 48th year the RAF has taken part in the exercise. The squadrons get to integrate with many other squadrons from the USAF, US Navy and USMC for the exercise. Australia also sent Boeing E/A-18 Growlers to participate.

Afterwards, the Typhoons participated in Exercise Bamboo Eagle, designed to test the lessons learnt during Red Flag in a combat-representative, multi-dimensional battlespace to conduct testing, tactic development and advanced training in simulated contested environments.

RAF Detachment Commander, Group Captain Lefroy said: "Red Flag gives our people and the UK a unique opportunity to boost our interoperability and integration with US and Australian forces, including fifth-generation and cutting-edge capabilities, and match them against current threats."

First UAE Dassault Rafale

F1
FIRST
UAE
RAFALE
Dassault Aviation

THE FIRST Dassault F4 Rafale for the United Arab Emirates Air Force and Air Defence (UAEAF&AD) was presented by the manufacturer on January 29.

Aircraft serial 1101, a two-seat variant, is part of a record-breaking order valued at more than €16bn placed in December 2021 to acquire 80 Dassault Rafale F4s. The UAE is destined to be the first operator of the F4 variant outside of France and is the largest export customer of the Rafale fighter.

The F4 variant was qualified by the French Directorate General of Armaments in March 2023. The F4 boasts a huge upgrade to equipment and weapons on the Rafale, such as a new infrared search and track system aiding target detection and identification against low radar signature aircraft. New modes for the RBE2 AESA radar increase the Rafale's ability to detect and track ground targets in all weathers from very long range. The F4 houses the use of the Thales scorpion helmet-mounted display and can carry three of Safran's Armement Air-Sol Modulaire (AASM) HAMMER 1000kg precision-guided weapons.

Dassault Aviation stated that the aircraft will remain at its aviation flight test centre to undergo flight tests prior to the first deliveries to the UAEAF&AD scheduled to start at the end of 2026. The Rafale is due to replace the Mirage 2000s in service and will serve alongside Lockheed Martin F-16E/F Block 60 Desert Falcons.

UK MOD awards Draken new £173m contract

DRAKEN
G-FFRA
T311
WARNING

A Draken Dassault Falcon 20 at Teesside Airport Aviation News

IT WAS announced on January 29 that the UK Ministry of Defence awarded private aviation company, Draken, a new contract worth £173m to continue delivering armed forces training for responding to missile attacks, electronic warfare and air-to-air combat to the UK Military.

Draken will perform this role with a fleet of eight L-159E Honey Badgers,14 Dassault Falcon 20s and one Diamond DA42 from its Teesside International Airport base in Northen England and at Bournemouth Airport, Dorset. The Interim Medium Speed Operational Readiness Training Services are expected to run until 2030.

RAF officers in training or serving a front-line squadron often spend a day in the skies with Draken aircraft, sharpening basic fighter manoeuvres or defending against an electronic warfare threat. The services provided by the company maintain combat readiness for all areas within the RAF and other segments of the armed forces.

Air Officer Commanding 1 Group, Air Vice-Marshal Mark Flewin, said: “Our partnership with Draken is of fundamental importance as we continue to train and prepare all our front-line forces to meet emerging threats across the globe.

“The training delivered to date, simulating adversary threats while also allowing us to train in a representative and contested electro-magnetic environment, has never been more important to ensure the Royal Air Force is ready and able to support NATO and meet the threats of tomorrow.”

Finland’s air policing debut in Iceland

Finnish Air Force

THE FINNISH Air Force deployed four F/A-18 Hornets to support the NATO Air Policing Mission in Iceland for three weeks.

The deployment was the first time Finland has sent combat aircraft to Iceland since it formally joined NATO on April 4 last year. Materiel and personnel from Finland began to arrive in Iceland during January, the four Hornets arriving on January 24 at Keflavík Air Base; the air policing mission formally began in February. The last unit to perform Iceland Air Policing was 617 Squadron of the RAF with its F-35B Lightning IIs.

Both the aircraft and the majority of the 50 personnel sent to Iceland belong to the Lapland Air Wing (LapLsto, Lapin Lennosto), which includes the Hornet-equipped Fighter Squadron 11 (HävLLv 11, Hävittäjälentolaivue 11) within its order of battle.

Airbus delivers two H225M Caracals to France

Airbus Helicopters

AIRBUS announced on January 17 that the first two of eight H225M Caracal medium-lift helicopters ordered in 2021 had been delivered to the Direction Générale de l'Armement (DGA).

Airbus Helicopters reported: "These helicopters will be operated by the French Air and Space Force, replacing Pumas currently in service in overseas territories (French Guiana, Djibouti and New Caledonia) and will contribute to the harmonisation of the French Air and Space Force's helicopter fleet. They will be used for operational missions, search and rescue and utility missions."

The eight Caracals will be equipped with modern avionic suites including the Safran Euroflir 410 electro-optical system and the Sigma inertial navigation system. The cockpit will also boast the Thales VUHF radio TRA6034 and IFF (identification Friend or Foe) transponder TSC4000.

Farewell New Zealand C-130H

RNZAF C-130H, NZ7003 at RAF Brize Norton, Oxfordshire, during its final visit to the UK in 2022 Peter Foster

THE ROYAL New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF) has retired its fleet of C-130H Hercules after 60 years of service.

The fleet of five, retired on January 31, was operated by No 40 Squadron at RNZAF Base Auckland and clocked up more than 155,000 accident-free flight hours and almost 100,000 landings around the world. The C-130H served the RNZAF in areas such as Vietnam, Antarctica, Afghanistan, China and the Soviet Union.

Over recent years, the C-130H fleet transported personnel to Europe to further support Ukraine against Russia and assisted in the evacuation of refugees from Afghanistan. Although the aircraft underwent a life extension programme, they have handed over the airlift baton to the newer Lockheed Martin C-130J variant of the Hercules – the last of five that were ordered by New Zealand arrived in December last year.

The RNZAF plans to have one of the retired aircraft on display at the Air Force Museum at Wigram in Christchurch. The fate of the other four H models is yet to be announced.

New F-15Es with EPAWSS arrive in the UK

THE US Air Force's first F-15E Strike Eagles equipped with the advanced AN/ALQ-250 Eagle Passive/Active Warning and Survivability System (EPAWSS) have arrived at the 48th Fighter Wing at RAF Lakenheath, Suffolk.

This new electronic warfare system has been developed by BAE Systems in co-operation with Boeing. EPAWSS provides a significant upgrade of the F-15E's capabilities to counter modern threats in contested environments.

It follows years of development and testing of the EPAWSS, which is designed to replace the legacy Tactical Electronic Warfare System (TEWS).

The new system enhances the F-15E's ability to detect, identify and counter both airborne and ground-based threats, improving survivability and operational effectiveness in high-threat environments.

Two F-15Es upgraded with EPAWSS were delivered to the 48th Fighter Wing, arriving after dark on January 16 this year. One aircraft has been assigned to the 492nd Fighter Squadron (FS) and the other to the 494th FS, allowing each unit to familiarise and train with the new system.

US strikes ISIS-Somalia

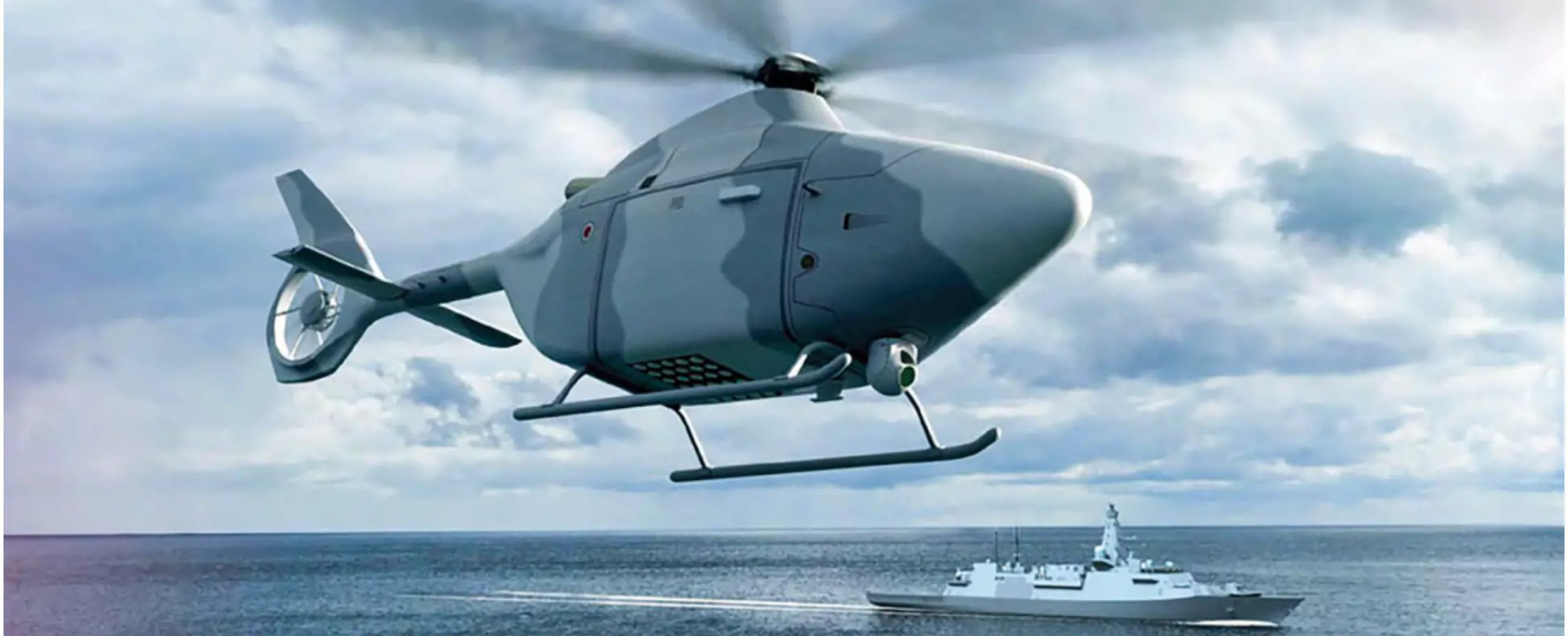
US AFRICA Command (USAFRICOM) conducted air strikes against ISIS Somalia on February 1.

After initial assessment by USAFRICOM, the strikes killed multiple ISIS-Somalia operatives in the Golis Mountains, but no civilians were harmed.

The type of aircraft utilised for the strikes has not been released. However, images provided with a USAFRICOM press release show US Navy F/A-18 Super Hornets operating from the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS *Harry S Truman* (CVN 75). The *Truman* is currently operating in the US Central Command area of responsibility.

US Navy

Leonardo unveils Proteus demonstrator design



LEONARDO, THE Royal Navy and the UK MOD Defence Equipment and Support Future Capability Innovation team unveiled the design of the Proteus technology demonstrator aircraft in early January.

The uncrewed rotorcraft, weighing roughly three tonnes, will demonstrate advances in autonomy and payload modularity and interchangeability. This can be seen via a modular payload bay in the design. The demonstrator is due to fly for the first time in mid-2025, three years after Leonardo was awarded a £60m contract to develop and manufacture the Rotary Wing Uncrewed Air System (RWUAS) demonstrator at its Yeovil, Somerset, facility. Leonardo

ORDERS UPDATE

Over the Christmas period and throughout January, many orders were placed across the defence sector. Here are some rather significant examples:

Eurofighter

• On December 20, Spain placed an order for 25 Eurofighters with the NATO Eurofighter and Tornado Management Agency (NETMA). This programme, known as Halcon II, comprises 21 single-seat and four twin-seat Eurofighters destined to replace part of the F-18 fleet in service with the Spanish Air and Space Force. The contract augments an order in 2022 and will see the Spanish fleet grow to 115 Eurofighters. The first delivery is due in 2030. Spanish Eurofighters are assembled, tested and delivered at the Airbus Getafe site in Madrid.

• On December 23 last year, Italy placed an order for 24 Eurofighters in Rome with NETMA. The new jets will replace the older tranche 1 versions in service with the Italian Air Force. The new Eurofighters will be capable of operating Brimstone III and Meteor weapons and are expected to have a service life beyond 2060.

Leonardo

• The Bundesheer (Austrian Air Force) has selected the Leonardo M-346FA for fast-jet training and light fighter duties to succeed the SAAB 105OE. Announced on December 28, 2024, Austrian defence minister Klaudia Tanner confirmed a plan to acquire 12 M-346FAs as part of a 'government-to-government' acquisition with Italy. A purchase price and delivery details for the 12 M-346FAs were undisclosed, with a Bundesheer statement saying contract details are "currently being negotiated with the Italian government".

Embraer

KC-390

• In mid-December, Embraer announced that the Slovak Ministry of Defence (MoD) had signed a letter of intent with the Brazilian MoD to potentially purchase three C-390 Millennium airlifters.

• On December 27, Embraer signed a contract with an undisclosed customer for two C-390s, plus a comprehensive training and support package. At the time of writing, this customer is still undisclosed.

A-29 Super Tucano

On January 14, Embraer announced that the Uruguayan Air Force had placed a firm order of five A-29 Super Tucanos, becoming the sixth nation to operate the A-29 in South America.

• On December 31, Embraer announced the sale of four A-29 Super Tucanos to an undisclosed new customer in Africa. This customer will be the sixth operator of the A-29 in the African continent. These ordered A-29s are to perform a wide spectrum of missions including border surveillance, ISR, close air support and advanced flight training.

• On December 30, Embraer announced a firm order of six A-29 Super Tucanos placed by undisclosed customer. Embraer mentioned that deliveries from this order are scheduled to take place in 2026. There was no mention whether this is a new or existing A-29 operator or which continent the nation is from.

• In mid-December, Portugal ordered 12 Embraer A-29N Super Tucanos. Portugal will be the launch customer of the A-29N, the NATO version of the A-29. The A-29N will modernise Portugal's training fleet and provide other capabilities, such as close air support and ISR. It is not yet announced, but the A-29s will potentially be based at Beja AB, the previous base for the Alpha Jet, which was retired in 2018.

Irish Air Corps

• Published on December 30, the Irish government announced it had ordered four H145Ms from Airbus Helicopters UK. The contract is valued at €91.7m and will see the H145M replace the ageing H135; the new aircraft will be used to train pilots within the Irish Air Corps and the Garda Air Support Unit. The helicopters will also bring capabilities for maritime security, utility, Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance (ISTAR) and light attack missions. It is anticipated that deliveries will begin in Q1 2027.

Japan

• Textron Aviation Defense LLC announced on January 28 that Japan selected the Beechcraft T-6 Texan II to train its future Japan Air Self-Defense Force (JASDF) pilots. The T-6 Texan II will replace the current Fuji/Subaru T-7 aircraft in the basic trainer role for the JASDF. The number of Texan IIs was not disclosed in the announcement.

• It was reported by *Janes* in mid-January that Japan's Acquisition, Technology and Logistics Agency (ATLA) awarded Kawasaki Heavy Industries a contract to produce 17 CH-47J/JA Block II Chinooks for the JASDF.

Canada Future Aircrew Training (FAcT) programme

On top of the orders for 23 new Grob 120TP trainers and 19 PC-21 aircraft announced in November for the 25-year RCAF Future Aircrew Training (FAcT) programme, more orders have now been placed.

In January, team SkyAlyne announced it will acquire three de Havilland Dash 8-400s for the programme used to train Airborne Electronic Sensor Operators (AES Op) and Air Combat Systems Officers (ACSO) and will replace the Dash 8-100s (CT-142), nicknamed "Gonzo". When operational, the Dash 8-400 fleet will be based at 402 squadron in Winnipeg, Manitoba. It was also announced that seven Beechcraft King Air 260s had been contracted to the programme. The King Air 260 will serve as the multi-engine training aircraft within the FAcT programme and will replace the King Air 90B. The new aircraft will operate from Southport, Manitoba, and deliveries are scheduled to start in the first half of 2028.

Lockheed Martin delivers first F-16 Block 70 to Bulgaria

Lockheed Martin announced that it delivered the first of 16 F-16 Block 70 jets to Bulgaria on January 31.

Taking place at Lockheed Martin's facility in Greenville, South Carolina, the ceremony was attended by Bulgaria's Minister of Defence, Atanas Zapryanov. Bulgaria placed two separate orders for eight F-16 Block 70s in 2019 and 2022. Bulgaria will be the second European country to receive the block 70 variant after Slovakia.

Lockheed Martin has a backlog of 117 F-16 Block 70/72 jets to be produced in Greenville. 23 have already been delivered to international partners.

Lockheed Martin

XH558 safe at last

It has long been debated where Avro Vulcan B.2 XH558 would end up following its final flight on October 28, 2015 – even more so when its Doncaster Sheffield Airport (DSA) home closed on November 30, 2022. However, on December 3, 2024, the Vulcan to the Sky Trust (VTST) received confirmation of the delta-winged icon's long-term future at the former South Yorkshire airport following ongoing discussions with the City of Doncaster Council (CDC). Having been based at DSA since 2011, the jet's future looked uncertain when news of the imminent closure emerged.

With VTST's previous lease with Peel Holdings, DSA's owner, due to expire in June 2023, the charity's hand was forced to consider looking for a new home for the jet.

With conversations between them and the CDC continuing while the latter prepare to announce a new airport operator, Marc Walters, chief executive of VTST said: "We are thrilled that following ongoing conversations with the CDC and the team behind the bid to reopen DSA, we have had our longer-term future at the airport confirmed. This is fantastic news for the charity and its supporters as we feel that XH558 is in the right location, owing to her history and links with the airport, the former RAF Finningley."

Seen here at is former RAF Finningley home in 2015, XH558's long-term future at the site has been confirmed KEY-Jamie Ewan

Vertol airborne again in Sweden

On December 7, the skies around the Aeroseum at Säve Airport, northwest of the Swedish city of Gothenburg, welcomed the familiar site of the Vertolens Vänner association's Kawasaki-Vertol HKP 4 SE-JLY (ex-04070) following modification work to its hydraulic system to improve reliability. Better known by its 'Y70' callsign, the former Swedish Navy twin, tandem rotor helicopter was grounded following issues with a faulty hydraulic servo while being prepared to take part in celebrations to mark the Swedish Navy's 500th anniversary back in 2022.

One of 22 examples accepted by Swedish military use, 04070 was built and delivered to the air arm to the Nordic nation during 1973. Entering service the following year, the airframe spent most of its career on strength with the 2.a Helikopterdivisionen (2nd Helicopter Division) at Säve until being withdrawn from use in 2006 and placed in operational storage at Ronneby Air Base in southern Sweden. Performing the final HKP 4 flight in the Swedish military service on March 1, 2011, 'Y-70' was delivered to Säve and donated to the Aeroseum. Soon transferred to the Swedish Air Force Museum at Linköping, a team of former 2a Helikopterdivisionen personnel – later under the banner of the Vertolens Vänner association – returned the helicopter to the skies in September 2018. Now back in the air, as well as airshow appearances, it is hoped the helicopter will also be available for pleasure flights during 2025.

Fomer Swedish Navy Kawasaki-Vertol HKP 4 SE-JLY gets airborne at Säve on December 7 David Peacock

Rollout of the Lockheed L-1649A "Super Star"

Dirk Grothe

A milestone in aviation history was shown to the public for the first time on January 17: Lufthansa Technik completed the extensive assembly of a Lockheed L-1649A. The fully restored long-haul aircraft was pulled out of the hangar on its own undercarriage for the first time during its roll-out in Hamburg

Former N7316C (c/n 1018, delivered 1957 to TWA and last flight on 09.11.1983) has been under restauration by Lufthansa since 2008 in Auburn (Maine, USA) to restore it in an airworthy condition for future flights until the project was stopped in 2018 after 10 years and 150m Euros, the aircraft was shipped to Bremen/Germany in 2019. It was transferred to Paderborn in February 2021 and to LH-Technik Hamburg in October 2023.

The aircraft was purchased by Deutsche Lufthansa Berlin Stiftung in 2007 together with N8083H (c/n 1038 former TWA) and N974R (c/n 1040 former LH D-ALAN).

Following the roll-out, the aircraft will be dismantled into larger segments again in the coming weeks, before being transported by heavy transport to Münster/Osnabrück Airport in July. There, it will be painted in Lufthansa's original design from the so-called parabolic phase.

After painting, the Lockheed Super Star is scheduled to arrive in Frankfurt in October. Just in time for Lufthansa's 100th anniversary, from spring 2026 it will be the main attraction of the Lufthansa Group's new conference and visitor centre beside the Lufthansa Aviation Centre at Frankfurt Airport, together with the legendary Junkers Ju 52 D-AQUI. Thanks to a glass facade, the exhibits will also be clearly visible from outside. **By Dirk Grothe**

World first for Red Bull pilot

Audi
KITZBÜHEL
Vorsprung durch Technik
Red Bull
priceless
GENERALI

Red Bull/ Mirja Geh

In mid-January, Red Bull pilot Dario Costa performed a world first by flying his Zivko Edge 540 down the Streif in Kitzbuel, Austria, reputedly the world's most notorious downhill skiing course. The Italian pilot achieved the challenge of reaching top speeds of 350kph, facing over 10G and performing two incredibly difficult dives to fly under the Red Bull arch at the edge of the famous Hausbergkante drop away and then the Audi arch in the finish arena.

No pilot has ever attempted to fly down a ski racing course before, Costa said: "Records can be broken, but world-firsts are remembered forever. The particular difficulty of this flight lay in the fact that there's no data that could have been analysed in advance. With no empirical data, no matter how well you prepare, there's always a big question mark as to whether it is even feasible." An additional challenge was obtaining all the necessary authorisation. The Flying Bulls had to submit a comprehensive risk assessment, ballistic calculations, the flight path strategy and my documentation of the preparations on site, as well as many other details, to the responsible authorities.

Turkey's Baykar buys Piaggio

In early January, the Italian government cleared the sale of Piaggio Aerospace, which has been in receivership since 2018. Production of the company's P.180 Avanti Evo has been continuing, with two delivered in the first nine months of 2024. The company is now to be acquired by Turkish aerospace company, Baykar Technologies which manufacturers unmanned air vehicles which intends to continue production of the Avanti. **By Rod Simpson**

2024 - a record year for Daher

With a total of 82 TBMs and Kodiaks delivered, 2024 was a record year for French manufacturer Daher, representing an increase of more than 10% on 2023. The Quest Kodiak was in high demand with 25 delivered – this included 10 in the US, with one Kodiak 900 being for the Missouri Highway Patrol. Total Kodiak production has now passed the 365 mark. The single-turboprop TBM series is now 36 years old. It has been upgraded many times, with 1,243 completed to date. In 2024, there were 56 of the TBM960s delivered, of which 40 were for the US, four for Brazil, two for Canada and one for Bolivia. The current order backlog for both types stretches well into 2026. **By Rod Simpson**

Rod Simpson

UK says Farewell 757

Mark Broadbent reports on Jet2 phasing out its last Boeing 757 and how the type has served the UK airlines over the past four decades.

There's nothing quite like the Boeing 757 with its attractive lines and the unmistakeable note of the Rolls-Royce RB211-535E4 engines. Pilots enjoy the type's performance, and operators its versatility.

The 757's sheer likeability and its long-standing operations in the UK – spanning major leisure airlines (Air 2000, Britannia Airways, Monarch Airlines), flag carrier British Airways, and independent operators – mean there has been enormous affection for the type.

'Bursting with character'

For all these reasons, Jet2 retiring its last 757 (G-LSAI c/n 24016) on January 5, 2024, was a true watershed moment. The carrier's final flight with the aircraft was LS812 from Geneva to Manchester.

The phase-out was relatively unheralded, although Jet2 did put a couple of short messages on the social media platform X. One said: "You were bursting with character and will be sorely missed by pilots and passengers alike #ThankYou757."

Speaking during a January 2025 podcast with *The Independent* newspaper's travel editor, Simon Calder, the chief executive of Jet2.com and Jet2holidays.com, Steve Heapy, reflected: "It's been a great aircraft, a fantastic carrier of people, but it's time to replace them."

Jet2 is undertaking a long-term 're-fleeting' with the Airbus A321neo; it is due to acquire up to 146 examples of the aircraft. The 757s, Heapy said, are "being replaced by the quietest, cleanest aircraft in its class."

Manchester-based Jet2 became the final UK passenger 757 operator in October 2021, after TUI Airways retired its last example (G-OOBP c/n 30394). TUI had steadily wound down its 757 fleet over several years as Boeing 787 Dreamliners arrived.

Likewise, as Jet2 received new equipment – the A321neos in its case – so it too gradually phased

jet2.com
G-LSAI
Frien

▼ Jet2's final Boeing 757 G-LSAI takes off from Manchester Airport on January 5. Callsign 'Channex 75 Alpha India', departed at 1151hrs with a destination of St Athan for scrapping Charles Cunliffe

▲ A TUI 757 rolls out of a frosty Manchester Airport. Charles Cunliffe

out its remaining 757s. Jet2 operated 15 757s over the years, G-LSAA (c/n 24122) being the first back in October 2005, but by late 2021, the carrier had only eight 757s left.

These aircraft comprised G-LSAA, G-LSAB (c/n 24136), G-LSAC (c/n 25488), G-LSAE (c/n 24135), G-LSAI (c/n 24016), G-LSAJ (c/n 24793), G-LSAK (c/n 27973), and G-LSAN (c/n 26635).

More A321neo deliveries in 2023/24 meant these 757s were steadily withdrawn from use. G-LSAA was retired in November 2023, then G-LSAB in January 2024. G-LSAC, G-LSAJ and G-LSAN were all withdrawn in November 2024. Their final flights were roundtrips to Fuerteventura, Palma de Mallorca and Alicante, respectively.

By late 2024, Jet2 had just three 757s left (G-LSAE, G-LSAI and G-LSAK). These aircraft undertook a unique farewell photoshoot at Manchester on December 11, 2024, by lining up on runway 05.

Into service

The 757 in Britain reflects the wider UK airline story over the past 40 years – from a world of multiple operators, with colourful paint schemes, to consolidation, and ultimately time catching up with the 757, as airlines adopt newer aircraft.

UK airlines were key players in the 757 story from the aircraft's earliest days. British Airways was one of the two launch customers (along with the US carrier Eastern Air Lines) when Boeing formally announced the type in August 1978.

Following flight testing and certification, BA received its first 757-236 (G-BIKB c/n 22173) *Windsor Castle* early in 1983 (Eastern had become the first 757 operator in December 1982). Its initial 757 service was London/Heathrow-Belfast/Aldergrove, on February 9, 1983.

British Airways operated more 757s than any other UK carrier, using 62 in all, with an annual peak of 53 aircraft in service in 1999, but the carrier was just one of numerous UK passenger airlines to use the 757.

Colourful liveries

The 757 was the aircraft of choice for various UK leisure/charter airlines in the 1980s and 1990s, starting with Air Europe, which received G-BKRM (c/n 22176) in April 1983. Air Europe used 17 757s in total; this carrier collapsed in March 1991.

Manchester-based start-up Air 2000 chose the 757 to begin operations in April 1987; it started with two examples. Air 2000 grew during the 1990s and became First Choice Airways in 2004.

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Jet2
jet2.com
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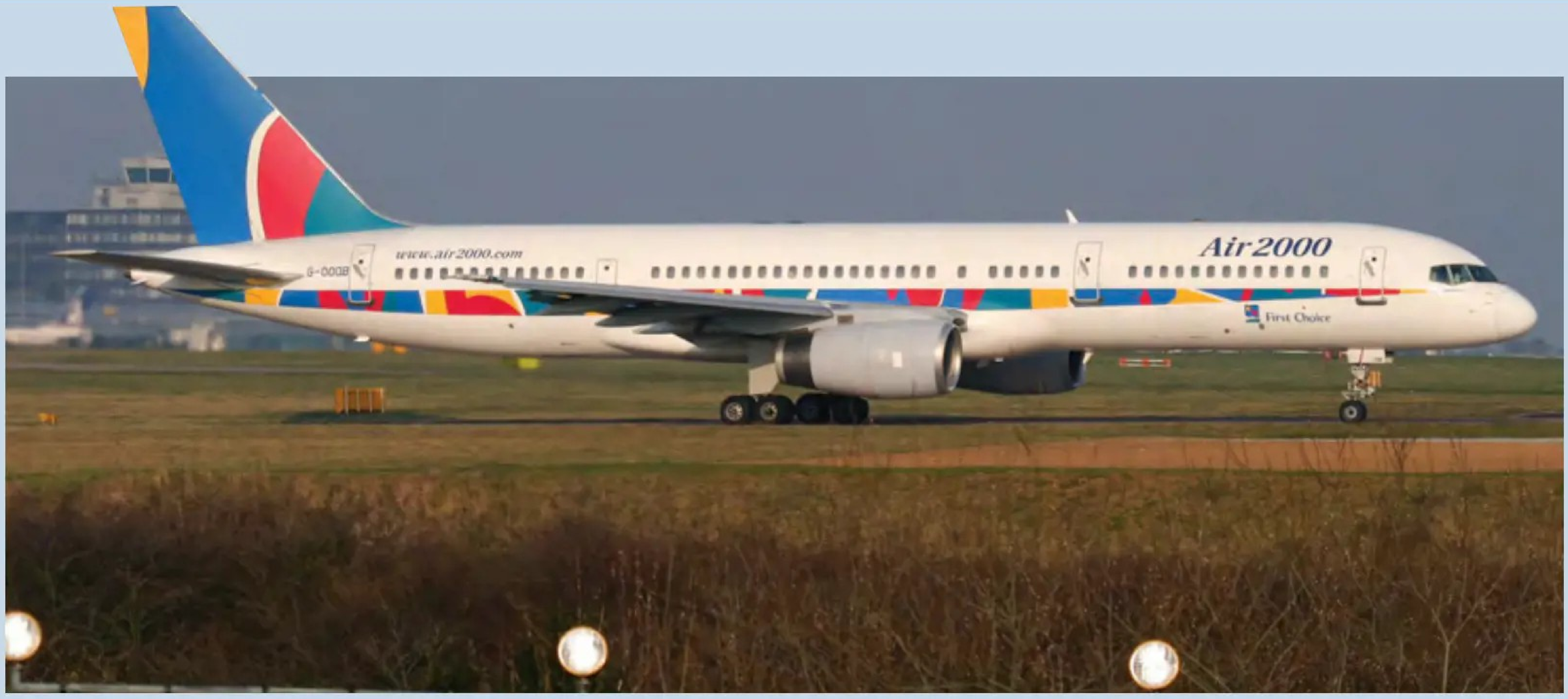


Manchester-based start-up Air 2000 chose the 757 to begin operations in April 1987; it started with two examples. G-OOOB can be seen here at the end of Manchester's runway John Higgins

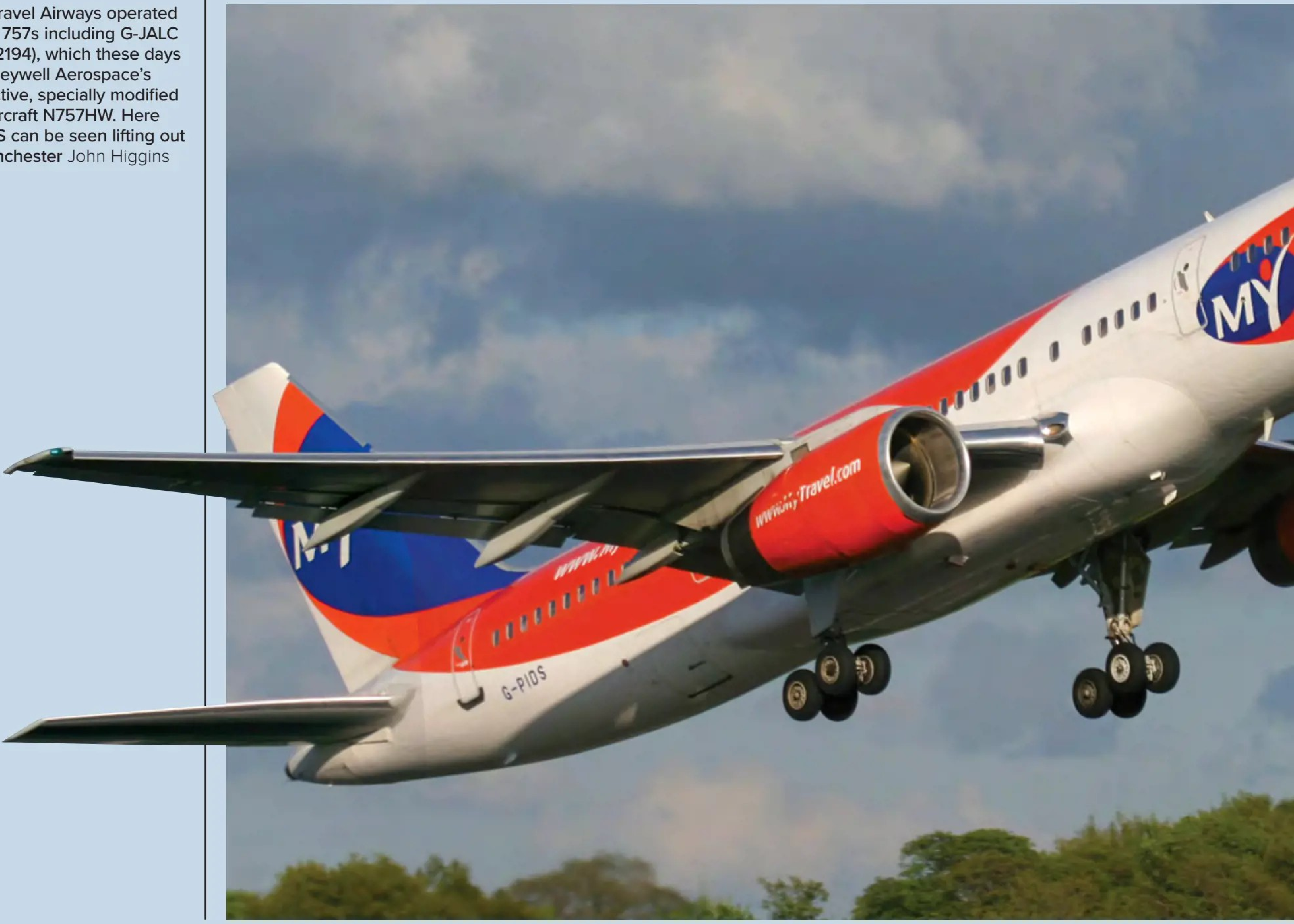
Four years later it merged with Thomsonfly to create Thomson Airways, which itself later became TUI Airways. The carrier operated a total of 20 757-200s over the years.

As well as Air 2000, a separate independent UK carrier to start flying in 1987 was Cardiff-based Inter European Airways, which used four 757s. Inter European was absorbed in 1993 into another Manchester-based leisure carrier, Airtours International Airways, which took on two ex-Inter European 757s, G-IEAB (c/n 24636) and G-IEAC (c/n 25620), which respectively became G-LCRC and G-CSVS.

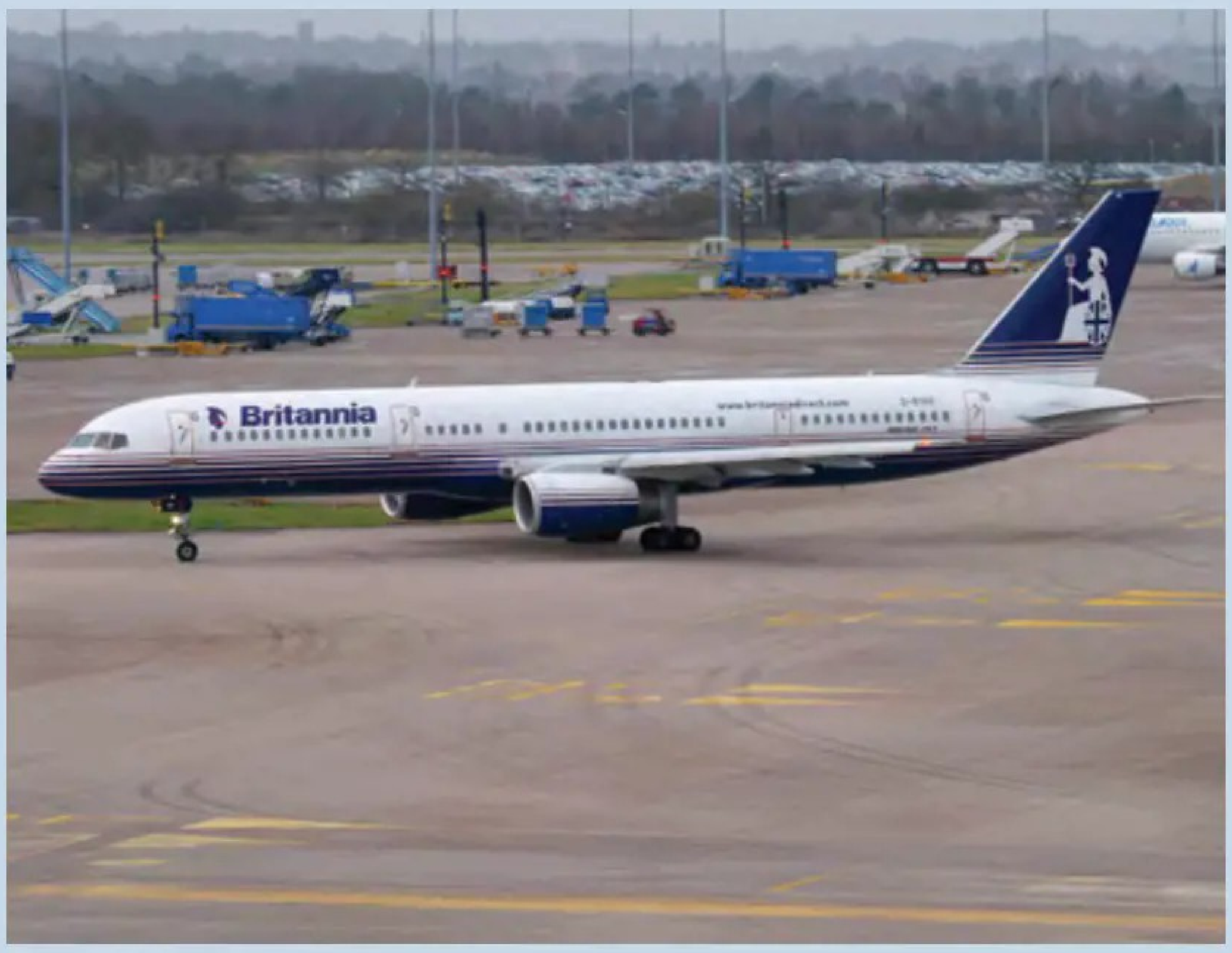
Airtours, which became MyTravel Airways in 2002, operated seven 757s including G-JALC (c/n 22194), which these days is Honeywell Aerospace's distinctive, specially modified test aircraft N757HW.

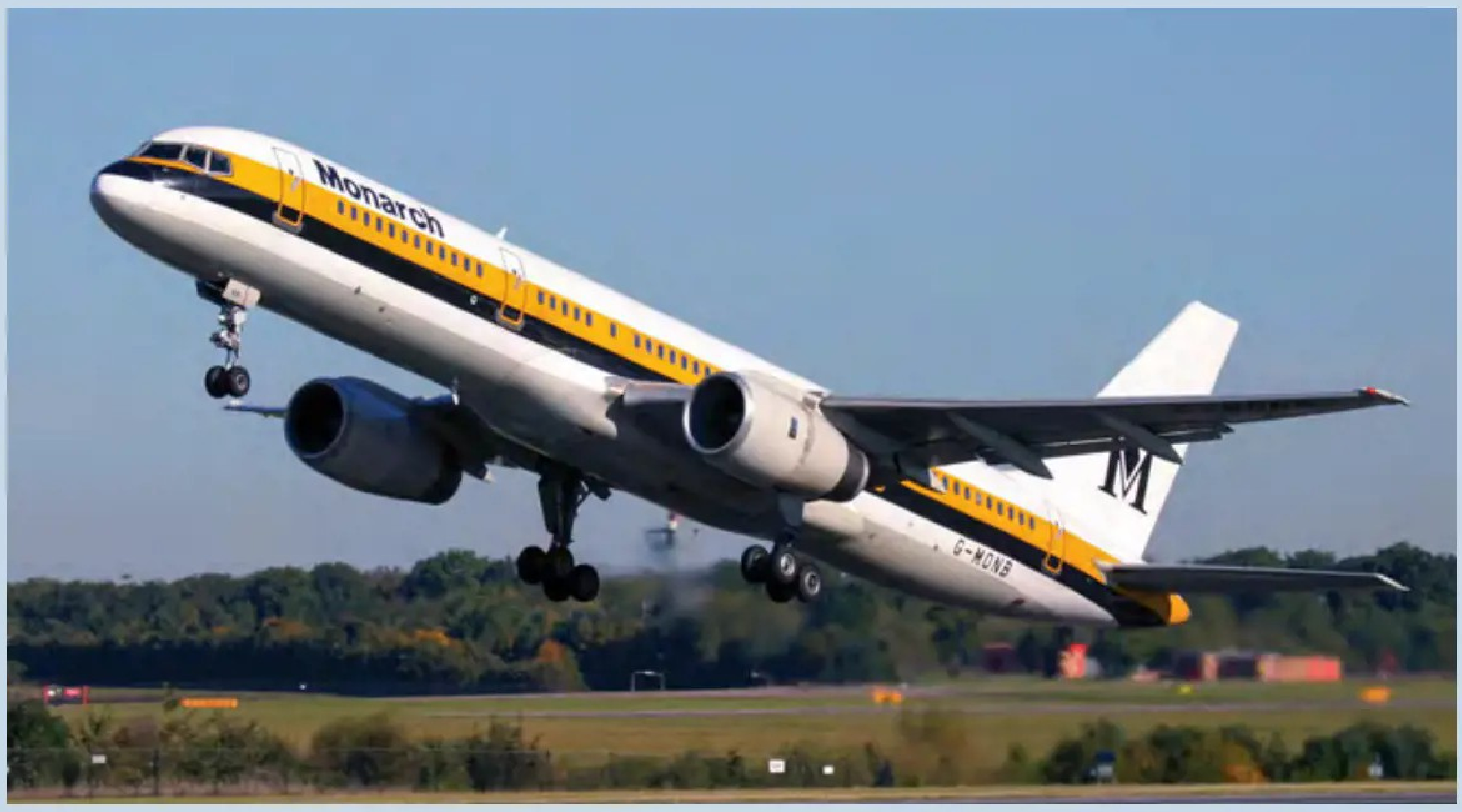
Two long-established UK charter carriers, Britannia Airways and Monarch Airlines, both operated 757s. Monarch received its first example, G-MONB (c/n 22780) in March 1983. Britannia operated 28 757s, the first arriving in 1991.

Britannia's examples wore what many enthusiasts regard as one of the finest 757 liveries ever: an elegant scheme of blue, white and red lines. This



MyTravel Airways operated seven 757s including G-JALC (c/n 22194), which these days is Honeywell Aerospace's distinctive, specially modified test aircraft N757HW. Here G-PIDS can be seen lifting out of Manchester John Higgins





▲ Monarch received its first example, G-MONB (c/n 22780) in March 1983 John Higgins

◤ A Britannia 757, G-BYAE taxies out of Manchester Airport. Britannia operated 28 757s, the first arriving in 1991 John Higgins

was replaced by an all-over blue livery in 2000 when the airline's parent company, Thomson, was acquired by TUI. Britannia was rebranded Thomsonfly in 2004, and as noted merged with First Choice Airways in 2008 to create Thomson Airways (later TUI Airways).

Caledonian Airways operated eight 757-200s for several years in the early 1990s. These aircraft, part of a large 757 order placed by parent company British Airways, went to mainline BA when Caledonian Airways was sold.

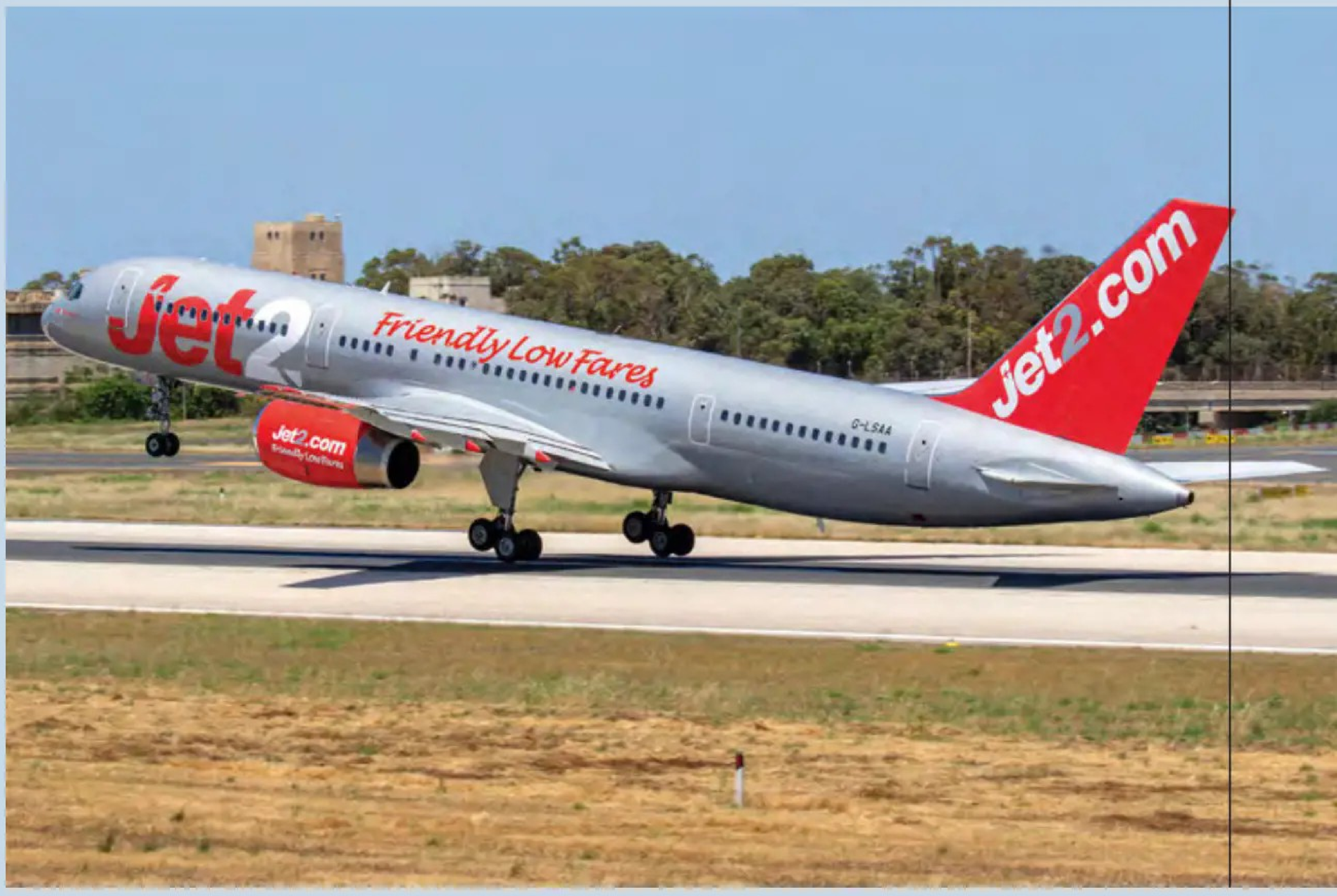
Flying Colours was yet another Manchester-based 757 operator, using 12 examples in all from 1997 to 2000. When consolidation among travel operators resulted in Flying Colours and Caledonian merging in 2000, to form JMC Air based at Manchester, the former Flying Colours 757s adopted JMC's distinctive lime green, blue and white livery. JMC, in turn, became Thomas Cook Airlines in 2003.

Thomas Cook would operate 26 757s in all, comprising 21 757-200s and five 757-300s, becoming the only UK operator of the stretched-fuselage 757 variant, until it withdrew the type in 2016.

Holiday aircraft

All these different airlines using the 757 so extensively over the years, with the different phases of consolidation/mergers resulting in various livery changes, ensured the type took millions of British air passengers overseas.

If you're from the UK and you went abroad on holiday during the 1990s, it highly likely you flew by 757 at some point. As the airline industry veteran Jonathan Hinkles (most recently the chief executive officer of Loganair) noted recently in our sister title *Airliner World*, official Civil Aviation Authority data shows UK airlines flew more than 471 million passengers by 757 over the decades.



▼ Jet2 757, G-LSAA departs Malta Airport, one of the many locations the 757 transported holiday makers to. Civil Aviation Authority data shows UK airlines flew more than 471 million passengers by 757 over the decades Charles Cunliffe

Package holidays you can trust
Jet2holidays

▲ Jet2 is undertaking a long-term 're-fleeting' with the Airbus A321neo; it is due to up to 146 examples of the aircraft. G-LSAK seen here was one of the final three 757s in service with Jet2 Lee Spencer

The UK passenger 757 fleet amassed 8.1 million flying hours across 3.1 million flights, Hinkles noted, that one in every four UK airline passengers flew by 757 during the 1990s.

The 757 did it all, whether on runs to Spain or Greece in the summer, taking people to the Canaries for winter sun, or for a skiing trip to the Alps. They did sectors to central European cities, and seasonal Santa specials to Scandinavia.

Transatlantic flights to Florida, Mexico and the Caribbean were mainstays of UK charter carriers' 757 flying. This putting to use the aircraft's medium-to-long-range capability and the aircraft's extended-range twin-engine operations (ETOPS) clearance.

Air Europe was the first British charter airline to operate 757s on transatlantic flights in 1989, on services between various UK airports and Orlando, Florida.

Whatever the route, it is probably fair to describe the 757 as the UK's holiday aircraft.

Versatility

Although the 757 is synonymous with leisure/charter flying in the UK, as the aviation consultant John Strickland, managing director of JLS Consulting, told *Aviation News* in 2021 how the 757 was a "very versatile" aircraft for British Airways.

Strickland worked as a network planner at BA back in the 1980s and he noted that the aircraft was "good for high-volume European routes, places like Paris, Milan and Rome" and also "great on domestic routes like the Shuttles where you wanted to take lots of people in one go".

The 757's size, range and performance made for a winning combination the UK airline Astraeus put to good use.

Hinkles was Astraeus' commercial director. He recalled that the RB211 engines' power "enabled us to do much that we couldn't otherwise have contemplated – a real asset in the airline's growth. We became adept at working out what new ventures our 757s could undertake".

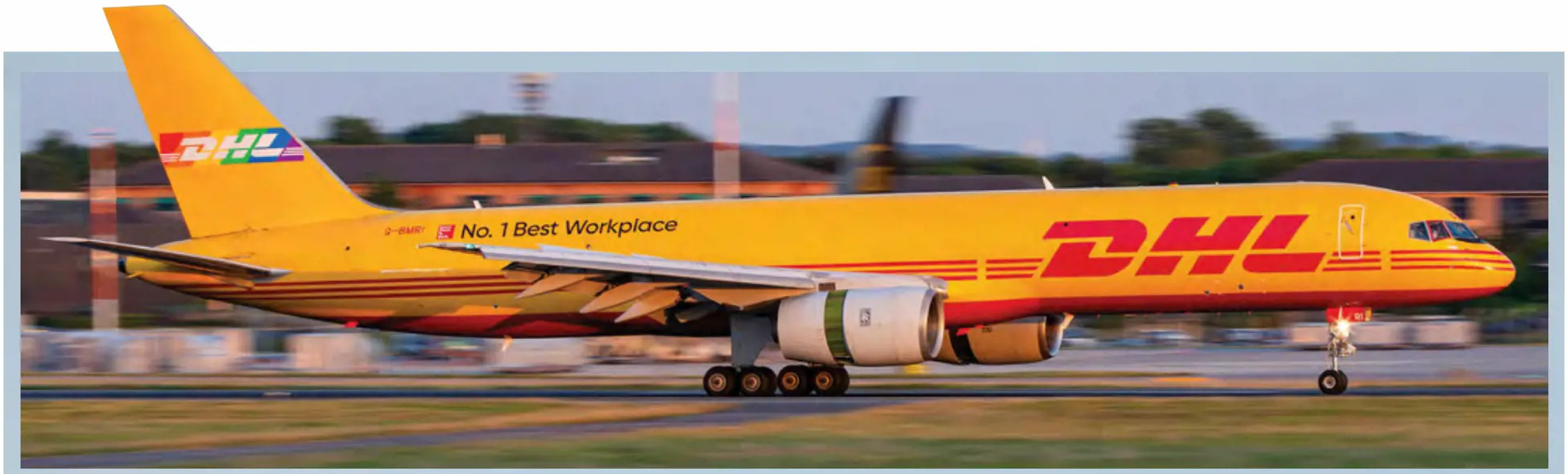
Astraeus was the first airline to fly the 757 into the French Alps airport of Chambéry, enabling 50% more passengers in one movement and "vastly superior" airfield performance. "On a single engine alone, it could climb over the surrounding mountains in a way that our 737s simply could not," Hinkles recalled.

▶ G-JMOF, a 757-300 served Thomas Cook / Condor airlines seen here landing at Manchester Airport Charles Cunliffe

Condor
Thomas Cook

▼ Luton-based Titan Airways was another UK charter operator. It used four 757s over the years. G-POWH can be seen leaving London Stansted Airport Charles Cunliffe

G-POWH
RYANAIR



▲ DHL 757-200 Special freighter, G-BMRI, landing at East Midlands Airport in some late afternoon light Charles Cunliffe

"We could thus safely fly a 757 approach to lower weather minima than the 737, with certainty that the big jet's capability would always carry the day."

Hinkles recalled the 757's "superb airfield performance came into its own" in other applications, such as nonstop missions from the UK to the challenging airport on the Greek island of Skiathos or flying gas workers to Kazakhstan.

Luton-based Titan Airways was another UK charter operator. It used four 757s over the years: G-POWH (c/n 29308), G-POWJ (c/n 29307, currently TF-LLL with Icelandair), G-ZAPU (c/n 26151, now a converted 757 freighter with FedEx), and G-ZAPX (c/n 29303, which ended up as G-LSAO with Jet2 for spares).

Cargo and Excalibur

For all the 757's utility and popularity with passengers, crews and enthusiasts, an ageing aircraft in the cost-conscious airline business means only one thing: replacement.

The new-generation A321neo, and its A321LR/XLR derivatives, have cost savings from the 757. They also offer the 'Seven-Five's flexibility, in being able to switch from long-haul to short-haul. Take for instance Aer Lingus, a one-time 757 operator, which uses A321LRs on both European leisure routes and transatlantic flights.

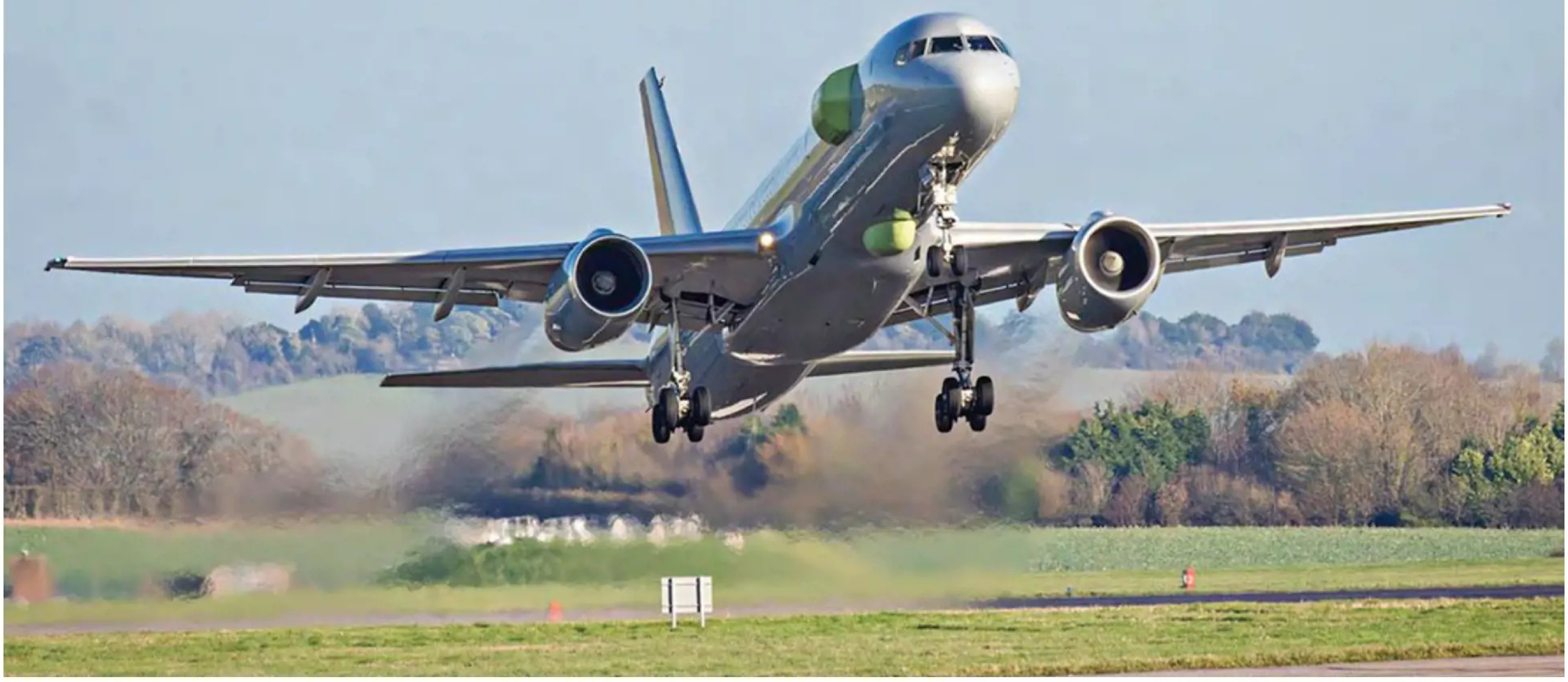
Despite the last UK passenger 757 retirement, there are still 757s in Britain. DHL Air UK at East Midlands Airport continues to operate five 757-236SF converted freighters: G-BMRA (c/n 23710), G-BMRB (c/n 23975), G-BMRC (c/n 24073), G-BMRD (c/n 24267) and G-BMRE (c/n 24268). All were once in the British Airways 757 fleet; G-BRME was one of those 757s used by Caledonian in the 1990s.

Meanwhile, the ex-Titan G-POWH (originally Iberia EC-HIR from new in 2000) was acquired by 2Excel Aviation in 2023. Reregistered as G-FTAI, this aircraft is now called Excalibur, supporting the technology development/testing for the UK's next-generation fighter, Tempest.

Excalibur is one of several test and demonstration activities BAE Systems, Leonardo UK, Rolls-Royce and MBDA are working on, in conjunction with the UK Ministry of Defence. This with a rationale to develop Tempest for service entry in the 2030s, and the Global Combat Air Programme, an international collaboration between the UK, Italy and Japan on a sixth-generation fighter. Excalibur will be adapted to host integrated sensors, effects and integrated communications systems.

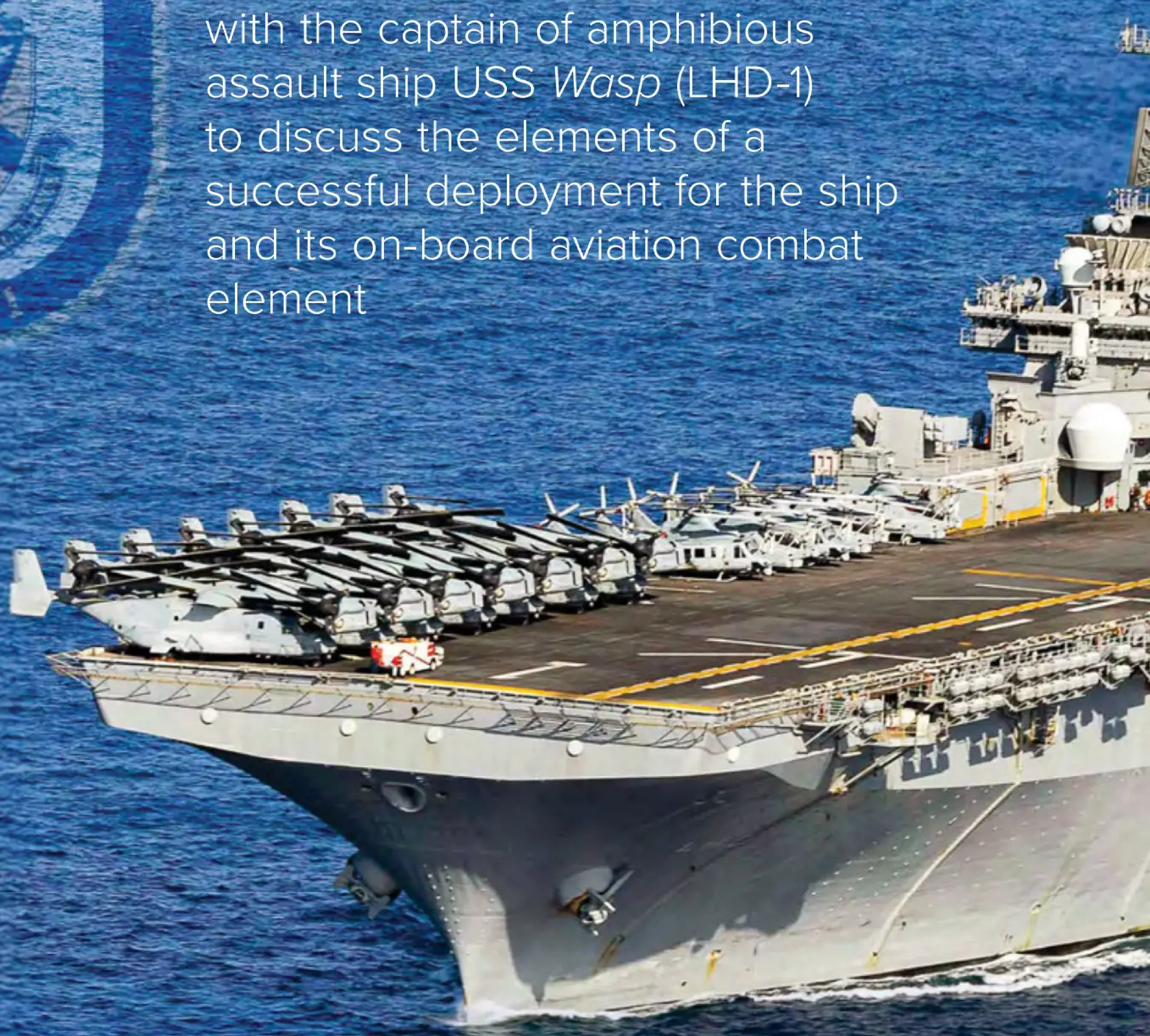
Excalibur, and the cargo 757s, mean that although the age of passengers flying aboard UK 757s is now over, the 757 will still be seen in British skies. AN

▼ Ex-Titan G-POWH (originally Iberia EC-HIR from new in 2000) was acquired by 2Excel Aviation in 2023. Reregistered as G-FTAI, now called Excalibur supporting the technology development/testing for the UK's next-generation fighter Leonardo UK



Stingers

From work-up cycle to cross-deck exercises, *Aviation News* spoke with the captain of amphibious assault ship USS *Wasp* (LHD-1) to discuss the elements of a successful deployment for the ship and its on-board aviation combat element



Aircraft assigned to the VMM-365 (Rein) operate with the amphibious assault ship USS Wasp (LHD 1) on November 22, 2024 US Navy/ Chief Mass Communication Specialist Ruben Reed

Over a seven-month period from June 1 to December 6, 2024, *Wasp* (LHD 1) deployed to the US 6th Fleet area of operations as the flagship of the Wasp Amphibious Ready Group (WSP ARG). The ARG performed operations in the Atlantic Ocean, North Sea and the Mediterranean. In addition to *Wasp*, the WSP ARG force comprised San Antonio-class amphibious transport dock ship USS *New York* (LPD 21), Harper's Ferry class dock landing ship USS *Oak Hill* (LSD 51), and 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) Special Operations Capable (SOC).

Within the 24th MEU (SOC) is a Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF) with a command element, a Ground Combat Element, Battalion Landing Team 1/8, and Logistics Combat Element, Combat Logistics Battalion 24 and an Aviation Combat Element (ACE) Medium Marine Tiltrotor Squadron VMM-365 Reinforced (REIN) .

As far as air power is concerned, the WSP ARG did not run short. The 'Blue Knights' of VMM-365 (REIN) comprised a total of 27 aircraft across the ARG. Sat on the deck of the Wasp were ten MV-22B Ospreys, six AV-8B Harriers, three UH-1Y

up!

Venom utility helicopters and four AH-1Z attack helicopters. Also embarked was a detachment from the 'Dragon Whales' of Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron (HSC) 28, which included three MH-60S Seahawk Helicopters. Onboard *New York*, four CH-53E Super Stallions, part of VMM-365 (REIN), operated as a detachment from the ACE. Together, these air platforms provided capabilities including long-range strike, close air support, combat assault transport, command and control, low altitude air defence, counter UAS, anti-surface warfare, combat support, humanitarian disaster relief, combat search and rescue, aero medical evacuation, and organic airborne mine countermeasures.

For a MEU, the ACE is built around a MV-22B squadron as the base element and the additional capabilities are attached to provide the MEU the full scope of Marine Aviation capabilities. At the completion of the deployment, the detachment personnel, equipment and aircraft are returned to their respective parent commands. These detachments will then take the expertise and experience back to their parent commands and begin to train the next MEU Marines how to train and operate from the sea.

▲ **MV-22B Ospreys, assigned to the 'Blue Knights' of VMM- 365 (Rein), hold on the flight deck of the Wasp during flight operations during training in the Atlantic Ocean during its work-up cycle.** US Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Sydney Milligan

Putting the Sting in the Navy

As an amphibious platform, *Wasp* can deploy troops by sea and air simultaneously, via landing craft, air cushion (LCAC) and via MV-22B, UH-1Y, and MH-60S. Another effective ability is to provide those methods with cover also from the flight deck of the *Wasp* in the form of Harriers and AH-1Z Vipers.

When the *Wasp* is either performing training scenarios or called upon to support commanders in a real-life situation, the air assets on board are ready to act upon all challenges. Captain Chris 'Chewie' Purcell, Commanding Officer USS *Wasp* said: "As the flagship of the *Wasp* Amphibious Ready Group- 24th MEU (SOC), *Wasp* represents the US Navy's ability to operate with NATO allies and partners. Conducting operations with allied and partner naval forces demonstrates America's commitment to our like-minded Allies and supports the notion that we are far stronger and more capable to uphold free and open sea lines of communication when we stand together.

"Ultimately, the WSP ARG-24th MEU (SOC) is a 'Team of Teams', able to provide a flexible, mobile and ready option for US leaders to consider in defending American interests."

The crew often boasts that *Wasp* is the "number one ship in the fleet." One could have an opinion that the *Wasp* does live up to this title. Number one is not just a number on the side of the hull. Commissioned in 1989, *Wasp* is the first ship in its class and has a proven track record of firsts. In 2007, the *Wasp* was the first to deploy the MV-22B Osprey. In 2011, the *Wasp* was the first ship in the Navy to receive flight deck modifications to host the F-35B Lightning II. In October of that year, the ship made naval aviation history when an F-35B, test aircraft 'BF-2', landed safely on the flight deck, as the first at sea vertical landing for the USMC F-35B. In 2015, the Wasp served as the first test ship for USMC Operations Testing 1 (OT-1) for future F-35B deployments. Finally, in 2018 while sailing in Sasebo, Japan, the *Wasp* served as the first operational shipboard deployment for the F-35B.

More recently, the ship continues to live up to that rather bold statement. In 2023, it became the first US Navy ship with an expeditionary facility dog, Cmdr Ike, a three-year-old yellow Labrador, spearheading a pilot program intended to address mental health for sailors and marines aboard the ship. The *Wasp* is the first ship to deploy with the newest medical capability, the En-route Care System, which provides medical care for up to eight hours while a patient is transported via land, air, or sea. *Wasp* is also the test platform for the Navy's new beta test of the Sailor Edge Afloat and Ashore (SEA2) initiative to have Starlink enabled Wi-Fi systems intended to improve quality of life for the crew while deployed.

▶ **AV-8B Harriers perform flight ops aboard the USS Wasp prior to the ship's deployment** US Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 3C Keresea Illenye

▼ **Marines with the 24th MEU (SOC), jump from a CH-53E Super Stallion into the Mediterranean during a HELOCAST exercise** US Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 2C Jesse Turner

Preparation

Before the deployment, those aboard the *Wasp* had a packed and interesting work-up cycle. The ARG and MEU had a six-month pre-deployment training continuum. This is to integrate all the Navy and Marine Corps units and their people to be able to fight a battle together when needed. This was completed via conventional operations with realistic training scenarios.

The initial phase was a period of two months which was dedicated to joint planning and individual special skills training to the staff of the ships within the Amphibious Squadron (PHIBRON) and MEU staff. The next phase was three months of training which saw all aircraft of the MEU board the three ships of the ARG periodically and perform flight operations. The cornerstone of this phase is PHIBRON/MEU Integration (PMINT), a two-week period during which the MEU embarks aboard and is integrated with the crews of the three ships of the ARG, fully incorporating each unit's capabilities to create a lethal, ready, and responsive Navy-Marine expeditionary force via building strong relationships and interoperability between the Navy sailors and Marines during operations.

This PMINT phase was different. Normally conducted out at sea, the ARG and 24th MEU, had to conduct PMINT in port, which severely limited their ability to operate together to conduct evolutions at sea, such as: visit board search and seizure (VBSS) raids, ship to shore movement, flight operations, simulated strait transits, live fire exercises, and other full mission profile activities. When *Aviation News* asked why the *Wasp* conducted PMINT in port, it was due to several factors including ship maintenance and the grounding bulletin for all V-22 Osprey variants.

WSP ARG-24th MEU's final pit stop prior to certification and being able to deploy into theatre was a Composite Training Unit Exercise (COMPTUEX) off the coast of North Carolina and Virginia. On the first eight days, all individual units performed training enabled by Carrier Strike Group 4 (CSG-4) the US Navy organisation responsible for training and assessing CSGs and ARGs, as well as II Marine Expeditionary Force's Expeditionary Operations Training Group (EOTG), which is responsible for assessing, training and certifying the onboard MEU.

The Marines and Sailors aboard the *Wasp* were busy conducting flight operations, ship to shore evolutions, staff integration, and other high-risk evolutions as an individual unit. But once each ship demonstrated proficiency as an individual unit, the three ships combined to conduct COMPTUEX as a combined ARG-MEU team.

Flight operations during COMPTUEX saw aircraft perform live fire exercises, maritime security

Aviation Boatswain's Mate (Handling) Airman Josue Orozco, left, and Aviation Boatswain's Mate 3rd Class Mason Woods, assigned to amphibious assault ship USS Wasp, secure an AH-1Z Cobra aboard the Wasp US Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 2C Sydney Milligan)

An AV-8B Harrier with VMM- 365 (Rein), 24th MEU, lands aboard the USS *Wasp* USMC/LCpl John Allen

Sailors head out to chock and chain an MH-60S Seahawk helicopter, assigned to the 'Dragon Whales' of HSC-28 US Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 3C Keresea Illenye

exercises, amphibious landings, non-combatant evacuation operations, foreign humanitarian assistance, and counter unmanned aerial systems engagements. *Wasp* utilised Live Virtual Construction (LVC) technology to conduct valuable and realistic training in preparation for real world scenarios the crew might encounter on deployment.

During the ARG's COMPTUEX, a transfer of authority from national authority to NATO authority under Naval Striking and Support Forces NATO (STRIKFORNATO) in Lisbon, Portugal, was exercised. Transfers of authority within NATO Allies is a growing process implemented by CSG-4 on deploying CSGs and ARGs since 2020. This with a rationale to familiarise those deploying with the NATO command and control construct as the alliance strategically shifts from interoperability towards interchangeability.

VADM Doug Perry, commander, US Second Fleet and Joint Force Command Norfolk, who visited the *Wasp* on May 7, said: "While you are deployed, you are going to work extensively with our allies and partners, and your mission focus and leadership is critical. You are the men and women who directly support our national priorities and reinforce the rules-based order that is critical to US and Allied security."

Following completion of COMPTUEX, the WSP ARG was certified to deploy, and the 24th MEU was declared Special Operations Capable (SOC), May 12, 2024.

Purcell added: "Even before our deployment began, *Wasp* had a compressed and demanding work-up cycle. *Wasp* had a modified COMPTUEX and final certification for deployment. Additionally, rather than return home for a leave period following certification, we headed to Earle, New Jersey, to conduct weapons onload, and from there we began our deployment to US 6th Fleet."

6th Fleet and more firsts

On June 1, certified and loaded, the *Wasp* deployed to US 6th Fleet area of operations with the 24th MEU (SOC) on its deck. The 6th Fleet operates part of US Naval Forces Europe and Africa, headquartered in Naples, Italy, and ships within operate in the Mediterranean, Black Sea, North Sea and Barents Sea, and sometimes further afield if called upon. Purcell commented: "We accomplished a lot during our eight months at sea."

Just two weeks after arriving in theatre, the *Wasp* participated in Baltic Operations (BALTOPS) 2024, June 14-20. BALTOPS is a multinational exercise to train and strengthen partnerships of NATO and its

▶ **A US Marine with Battalion Landing Team 1/8, 24th MEU, provides security as a MV-22B Osprey, 24th MEU lands during a TRAP exercise as part of COMPTUEX on Stone Bay, Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, May 9, 2024** USMC/Cpl Aydan Millette

▼ **An HSC-28 MH-60 is moved in the hangar bay aboard the amphibious assault ship USS *Wasp* exercise** US Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 2C Amber Speer

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CRASH
CHIEF

◢ **Sailors tie down a AV-8B Harrier aboard the *Wasp*** US Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 2C Sydney Milligan

▲ **USMC Harrier lands and MV-22 Ospreys part of the 24th MEU were working alongside Swedish Air Force pilots at Ronneby Airport, Sweden, during BALTOPS 24, June 10, 2024** US Naval Forces Europe Africa

allies in the Baltic Region. BALTOPS included a cross deck with ESP *Juan Carlos* I (L 61) seeing Spanish Navy Harriers land aboard the *Wasp,* and Harriers and MV-22s of 24th MEU land on the *Juan Carlos*.

The culminating event of BALTOPS was an amphibious assault in Utska, Poland, for which 275 US Marines of the 24th MEU departed the *Wasp* and New York via LCAC, MV-22B Ospreys and CH-53Es. Alongside Marines from the Spanish ship *Juan Carlos* I and ground troops from Romanian Navy 307th Marine Regiment, they conducted an amphibious raid on the beach. During BALTOPS, Harriers and MV-22 Ospreys detached to NATO's latest member, Sweden to work with the Swedish Air Force. MV-22s also performed a cross-deck exercise with French ship *Mistral* (L-9013).

In July, the ARG-MEU executed Full Mission Profile (FMP) exercise. The FMP included various scenarios such as amphibious assaults, rapid response to emerging threats, humanitarian assistance, disaster relief operations, and the simulated non-combatant evacuation operation in vicinity of Souda Bay, Greece demonstrating the ARG-MEU's ability to evacuate non-combatants from potentially hazardous areas.

Aside from just utilizing AV-8Bs to conduct a strike and destroying the target, a mission like this performed in one of the aforementioned exercises would likely involve the Harriers shaping fires in the form of kinetic or non-kinetic effects designed to either disrupt an adversary or set the conditions for follow-on actions.

Leveraging AV-8Bs to provide long-range precision, the ARG-MEU team could then push forward forces ranging from a small raid force all the way up to multiple companies to seize an objective. Mixed sections of AH-1Zs or UH-1Ys could provide escort to an assault force transported in MV-22Bs or CH-53Es, and the MH-60Ss standby in lifeguard station to provide emergency rescue and additional support. Through detailed planning and the use of multiple ships within the ARG, ACE aircraft and HSC-28 could "yo-yo" from the objective area back to the ship to refuel and rearm, maintaining a consistent overhead presence for the troops on the ground. Close Air Support, Tactical Recovery of aircraft and personnel, and MEDEVAC aircraft remain only minutes from the fight. The MEU commander retains the ability to echelon additional forces ashore or retrograde the force if the objectives have been met.

In August, the WSP ARG performed more bilateral training, this time with Turkish counterparts. The ARG and MEU operated in conjunction with the Turkish Navy amphibious assault ship TCG Anadolu (L 400) and the Turkish Navy frigate TCG *Gökova* (F 496) in the Mediterranean, August 13-17. Bringing another first, an MV-22B of the 'Blue Knights' VMM-365 REIN was the first Osprey to conduct flight operations onboard the Turkish ship.

Between August 5 and 10, the 24th MEU conducted bilateral training with the Cypriot National Guard in Paphos, Cyprus. The 24th were the first ever MEU to organise a combined training detachment ashore in Cyprus. The MEU returned to Paphos and Larnaca for an additional combined training opportunity, from September 15 to November 1.

In October, *Wasp* participated virtually in Neptune Strike (NEST) 24-2 while remaining on station in the Eastern Mediterranean. During NEST 24-2, *Wasp* conducted a cross-deck evolution with the Italian Navy multipurpose aircraft carrier ITS *Cavour* (L-550) which saw USMC MV-22s land on the Italian ship.

During NEST 24-2, four Harriers of VMM-365 REIN travelled over 250nm, aided by a French Air and Space Force MRTT Phenix to conduct a simulated long-range maritime strike on an allied maritime target simulating red forces.

The deployment was also the first time Marine helicopters have trained at the Hellenic Army Aviation Training Centre. They were the first Marine Training Detachment to conduct "high hot heavy" training, including landing on Mount Olympus. Additionally, the

▼ **A Spanish Navy AV-8 Harrier from ESPS Juan Carlos (L 61) prepares to launch from the flight from the Wasp June 15, 2024, during a cross-deck evolution as part of BALTOPS 24 in the Baltic Sea** US Navy/Chief Mass Communication Specialist Darren M. Moore

◢ **A Turkish Navy Sailor assigned to the amphibious assault ship TCG Anadolu (L-400) directs a Turkish SH-70 Sea Hawk helicopter on Anadolu's flight deck during a cross-deck familiarisation event with the Wasp on August 15, 2024** US Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Sydney Milligan

◀ US Marines with Maritime Special Purpose Force, 24th MEU), fast rope from a UH-1Y Venom helicopter onto a static vessel to conduct visit, board, search, and seizure training on Naval Support Activity Souda Bay, Greece USMC/Cpl Elton Taylor

USMC facilitated and assisted the development of an air-to-air training syllabus for the Hellenic Army Aviation.

Speaking about the extensive international co-operation during *Wasp*'s time in 6th fleet, Purcell said: "We had multiple visits from our German friends aboard the FGS *Hamburg* (F 220), and were escorted at various times by *Duncan*, Hamburg, ITS *Federico Martinengo* (F 596), and HMCS *Charlottetown* (FFH 39) where a Canadian CH-148 Cyclone landed on the *Wasp*. We also sailed alongside HMS *Prince Of Wales* (R 09) and performed a 48-hour cross deck with HMS *Duncan*."

▶ Two MV-22B Osprey tiltrotor aircraft with VMM-365 (Rein) fly in formation near Paphos, Cyprus, September 26, 2024. The training, was co-ordinated with the Government of the Republic of Cyprus and is designed to strengthen the operational capabilities of both forces and reaffirm the strong security cooperation and commitment to regional stability between the US and Cyprus USMC/Cpl Elton Taylor

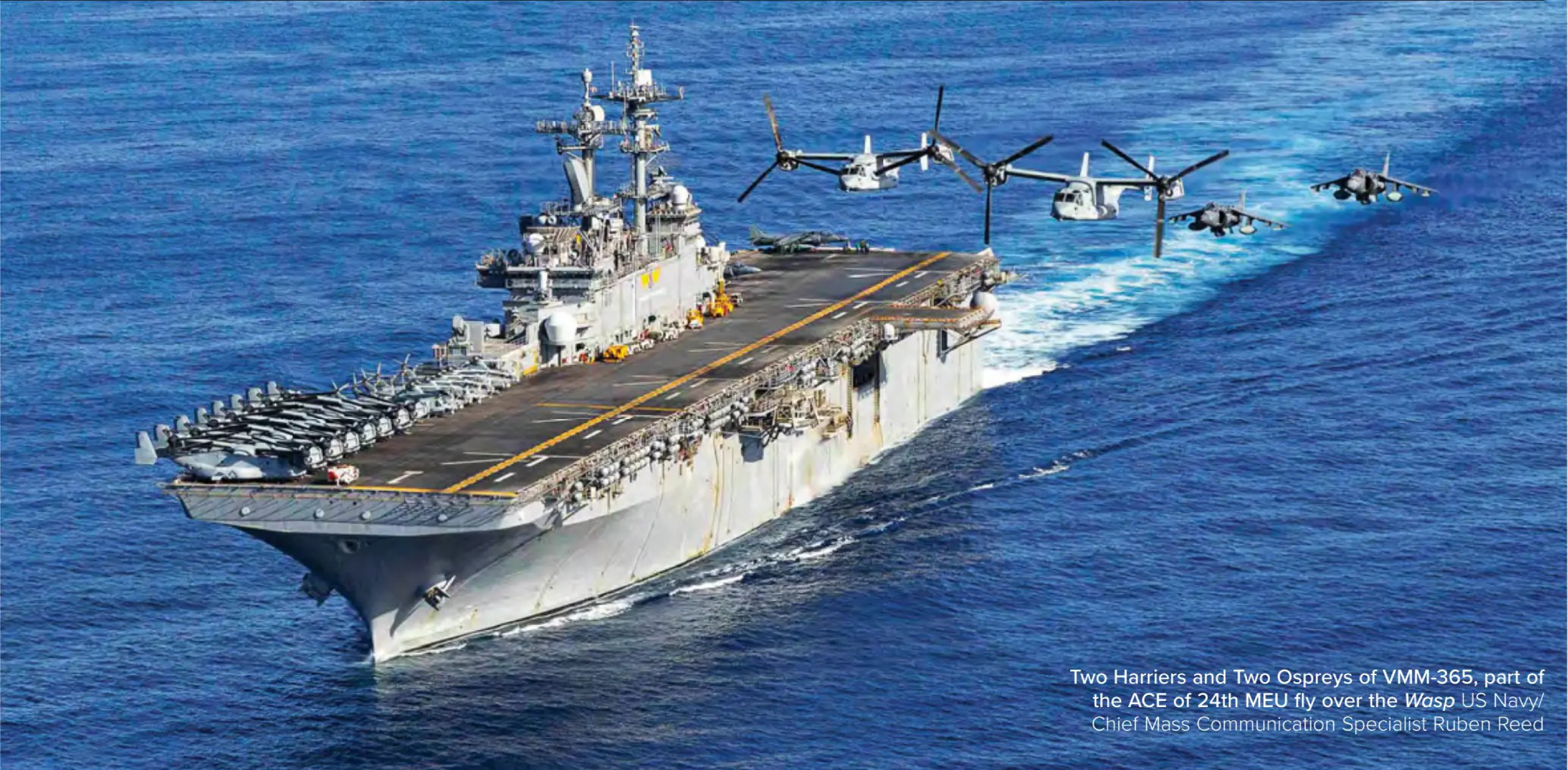
The cross deck with the HMS *Duncan* saw Royal Navy Merlin and Wildcat helicopters land on the deck of the *Wasp* providing an opportunity for seven sailors from each ship to spend time as a member of the other ship's crew.

During exercises like all of the above, new capabilities and qualifications were being attained by the sailors and Marines part of the ARG. *AvNews* asked Purcell about the importance of such exercises, he explained: "The ability to conduct integrated air defence remains a top priority for Naval warfighting excellence, and the ability to conduct these exercises with allies and partners further underscores our commitment to coalition strength across the world. LCDR Jeremy Capelotti, *Wasp*'s Plans and Tactics Officer added

"Given the new and extremely flexible warfare capabilities that unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) bring to the air problem, Naval air defence tactics continue to evolve to maintain air supremacy amid a wide variety of modern threats,. "These exercises allow us to precisely test our team against various air threat profiles, allowing our sailors to build pattern of life recognition by getting essential 'reps and sets' during these events."

Capelotti further described: "These events allow *Wasp* to test new means of warfighting against UAV threats, putting in motion future warfare doctrine updates down the line."

▼ US Marines with Maritime Special Purpose Force, 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) Special Operations Capable (SOC), board a CH-53E Super Stallion aboard the San Antonio-class amphibious transport dock ship USS New York (LPD 21) while underway in the Mediterranean Sea, August 4, 2024 USMC/Cpl Ryan Ramsammy



Two Harriers and Two Ospreys of VMM-365, part of the ACE of 24th MEU fly over the *Wasp* US Navy/ Chief Mass Communication Specialist Ruben Reed

ATLANTIC OCEAN (Dec. 1, 2024) Aviation Boatswain's Mate (Handling) 2nd Class Dalen Alexander, assigned to the amphibious assault ship USS Wasp, directs an AV-8B Harrier jet, assigned to the 'Blue Knights' of Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron (VMM) 365 (Reinforced), to take off from the flight deck, December 1, 2024 US Navy/ Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Sydney Milligan

The Unsettled Middle East

While deployed, the WSP ARG-24th MEU (SOC) was a 911-response force in the region. By maintaining a visible and capable presence in the eastern Mediterranean during the latter half of deployment, the WSP ARG-24th MEU (SOC)'s purpose was to enhance regional stability, reassure allies and partners, deter aggression from potential adversaries, and provide a rapid response capability to any emerging threats or crises.

"With the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon, we spent a good portion of our underway days 'tethered' close to the Israel and Lebanon border in the Eastern Mediterranean," expounded Purcell, when asked about the conflict in the Middle East. "Our mission was to be ready to support possible non-combatant evacuations of US citizens and embassy personnel in Lebanon on short notice."

"Because of that tether, this deployment was a long and uncertain one," Purcell concluded. "We were away from home 244 days, from April 6 to December 6. We spent 75 calendar days in port and 169 days at sea. Ports we visited include Skagen, Denmark; Rota, Spain; Limassol, Cyprus; Izmir, Turkey, and Souda Bay, Greece. We travelled approximately 34,000nm together since departing Norfolk in April. I could not be prouder of how our *Wasp* Family came together."

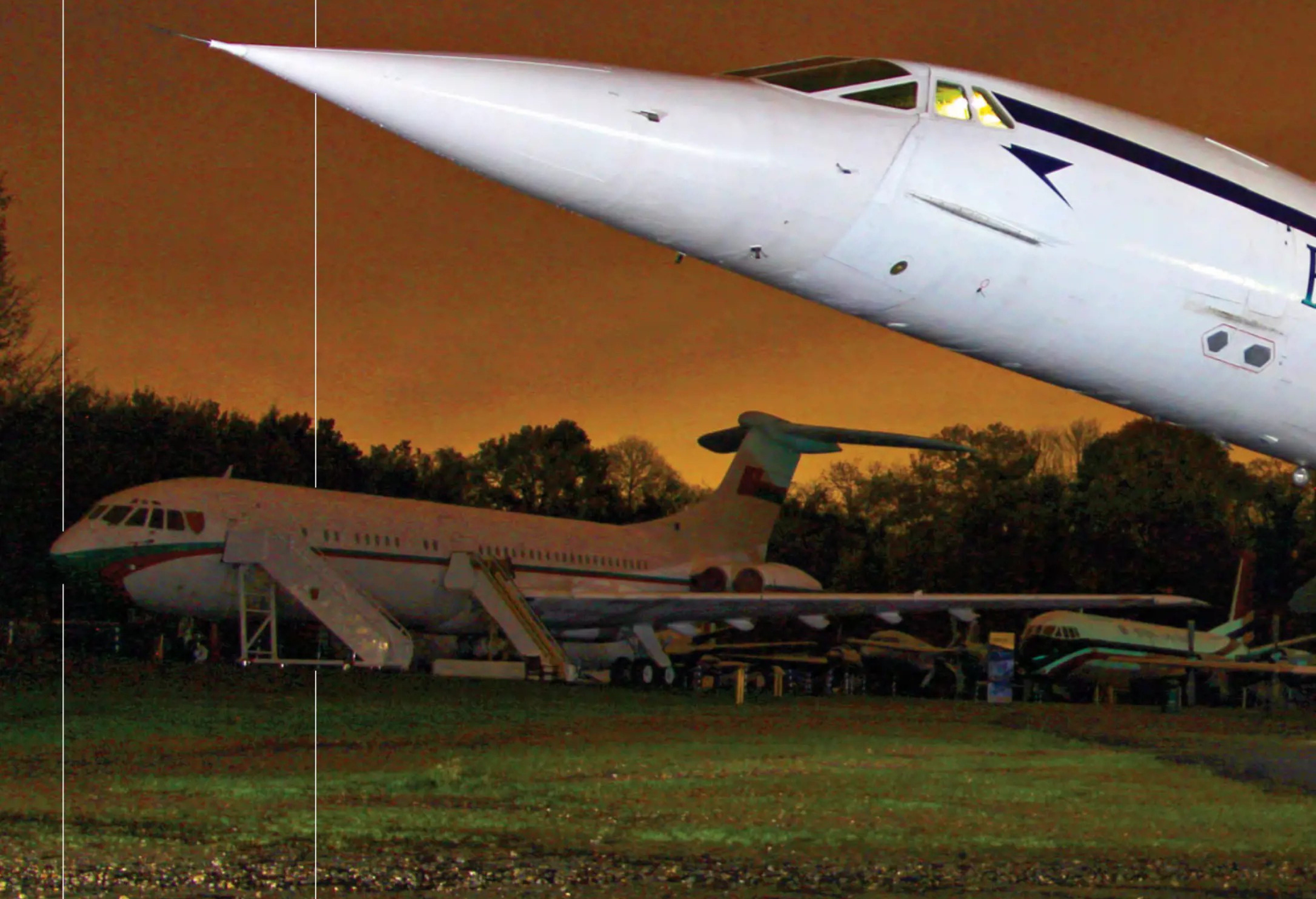
After serving seven months in 6th fleet, the AV-8B Harriers conducted a co-ordinated fly off, returning to MCAS Cherry Point December 2. The following day, all rotary wing assets with VMM-365 REIN, the AH-1Zs, CH-53Es, UH-1Ys and MV-22Bs conducted a fly off and returned to home base, MCAS New River. The MH-60S conducted fly off and returned to their home squadron in Norfolk, Virginia later that week. Finally, on December 6, 2024, the ships of the ARG and the people who served on them returned to Norfolk, Virginia.

After a return to Naval Station Norfolk, *Wasp* conducted a brief post-deployment stand down period to allow the crew a period of rest and recuperation. *Wasp* held a change of command January 15, during which Capt Paul O'Brien relieved Capt Chris Purcell and assumed command of *Wasp*. On January 21, *Wasp* got underway one final time to conduct a weapon's offload at Naval Weapons Station, Earle, New Jersey. At the time of writing, *Wasp* is scheduled to conduct a repair availability to provide modernisation and maintenance services, starting in February 2025.

A Royal Navy EH-101 Merlin lands on the deck of the Wasp during a cross-deck exercise with the HMS *Duncan*. US Navy

Simply the Greatest

Often considered the crown jewel of the Brooklands Museum, British Aerospace Corporation Concorde G-BBDG was the subject of a recent nightshoot. **Jamie Ewan** was there



▲ Threshold.aero's lights pick out the still futuristic looking curves of 'Delta-Golf' at her Brooklands home on November 17, 2024

KEY-Jamie Ewan

Climbing out the car at Brooklands, a nearby sign caught my eye: 'Brooklands: the birthplace of British motorsport, aviation and home of Concorde.' Mulling that over, the roar of an airliner brought me back to reality – a British Airways Airbus A380, its iconic white, red and blue scheme tinged golden as it climbed away from nearby London-Heathrow. Watching this modern marvel thread its way through the skies, I couldn't help but compare it to another aircraft in eyeshot dressed in the white, red, and blue, Concorde G-BBDG, better known as 'Delta-Golf' or 'DG', and the subject of that evening's nightshoot hosted by Threshold.aero. The words of BAC test pilot Brian Trubshaw, the first Briton to fly Concorde, ran through my head: "It's not unreasonable to look upon Concorde as a miracle."

British airways
1939

▲ **'Delta Golf' 50 years on from her first flight** KEY-Jamie Ewan

British airways
DG
ENTRANCE

Concorde is history's most extraordinary airliner. Flying on the edge of space, faster than a rifle bullet, she was a cliché queen. The epitome of Anglo-French collaboration, Concorde was unlike anything that had come before it, involving an unprecedented level of technological innovation. Pushing the British and French aviation industries to their absolute limits, they produced a symbol of technological daring. Not only an engineering marvel, 'she' was an icon of beauty and style. Every aspect was designed for aerodynamic efficiency and yet the outcome was something truly elegant, something instantly recognisable all over the world.

Brooklands is central to Concorde's story. Not only is it the location of the initial meeting between representatives from the British Aircraft Corporation (BAC) and France's Sud Aviation (later Aérospatiale) in 1961 that launched the project, it's also where

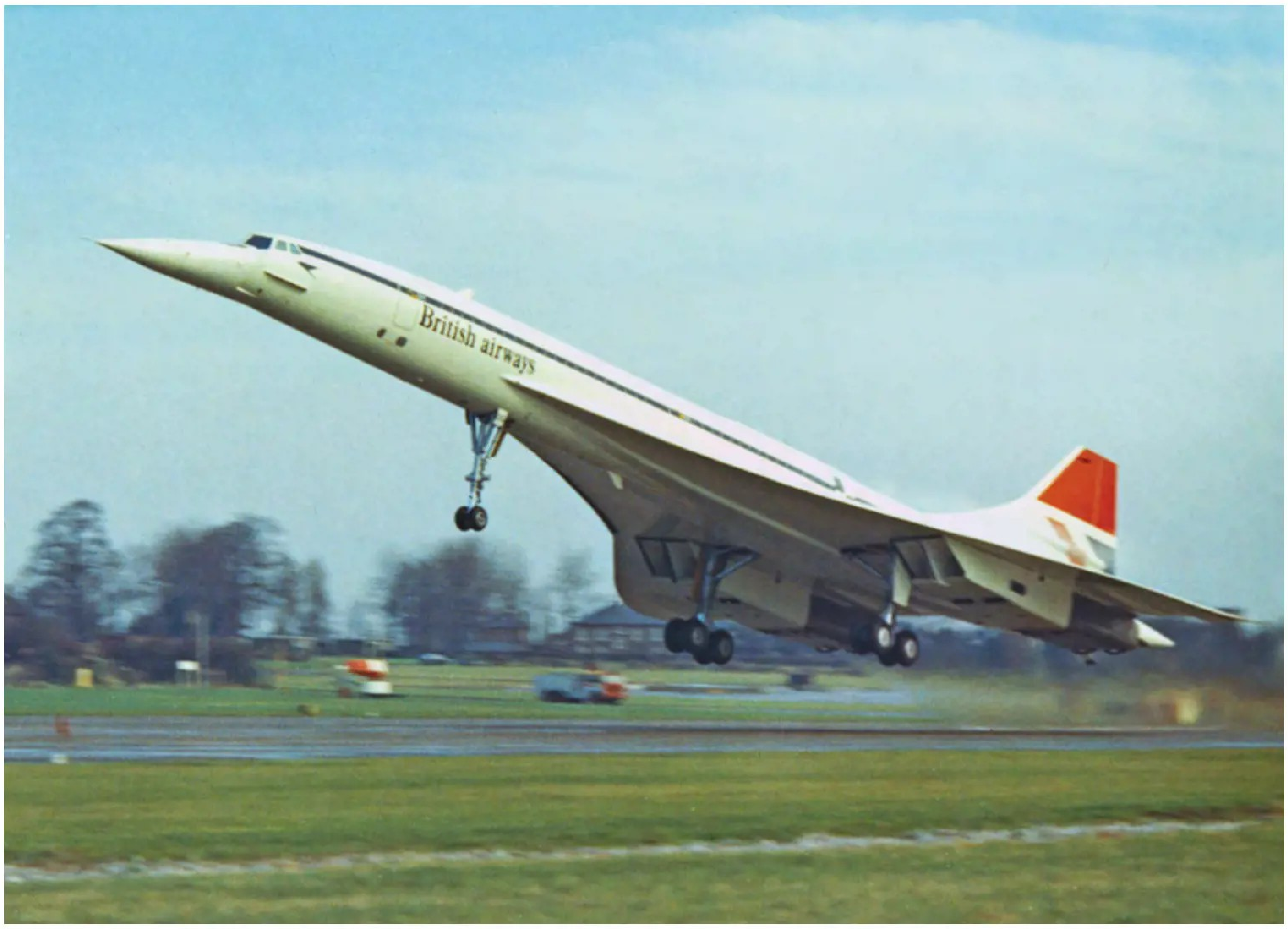
▲ A Concorde under the lights with the moon rising behind it KEY-Jamie Ewan

almost a third of every Concorde was made before being shipped out for final assembly, including G-BBDG, the first British production prototype.

By the time 'Concorde 202', slipped the surly bonds of earth from Filton, Bristol, for the first time on February 13, 1974, with Peter Baker and Brian Trubshaw at the controls, she had already been flying for almost five years. Powering through cloudy skies along the Bristol Channel, they pushed the fledgling jet to Mach 1.4 at 42,000ft, proof of their confidence. Swooping low over Concorde's main flight test centre at RAF Fairford, Gloucestershire, 'DG' touched down after an 1hr 45min in the air to join G-BSST and G-AXDN (the first British prototype and pre-production prototype, respectively) to complete the test programme needed to get Concorde into airline service. It was a similar story at Toulouse, where the French prototypes were busy with their own test responsibilities.

Testing and certifying Concorde was an incredible challenge, likened by some to the US space programme. Assessing every system and its functionality through all aspects of the flight envelope, on the ground and in the air, test points included air-conditioning, pressurisation, the automatic flight control system, flying controls, avionics, electrics, the engines and air intakes, the fuel and hydraulics systems, the droop nose and visor, handling and performance, structure, undercarriage and brakes, internal and external

▶ 'Delta-Golf' wore British Airways' iconic Negus livery for most of her operational life KEY-Jamie Ewan



▶ Peter Baker and Brian Trubshaw take G-BBDG for its maiden flight from Filton on February 13, 1974 BAE Systems

"It's not unreasonable to look upon Concorde as a miracle"

noise, as well as icing. Under these headings were countless more items that needed testing, as well as the failure modes and standby systems.

While the Airbus A380 took 20 months from maiden flight to certification following a 2,500-hour flight test programme with five aircraft, Concorde needed eight aircraft (two production airframes joining the effort in early 1975), some seven years and more than 5,000 hours of testing and proving.

"Simply the greatest"

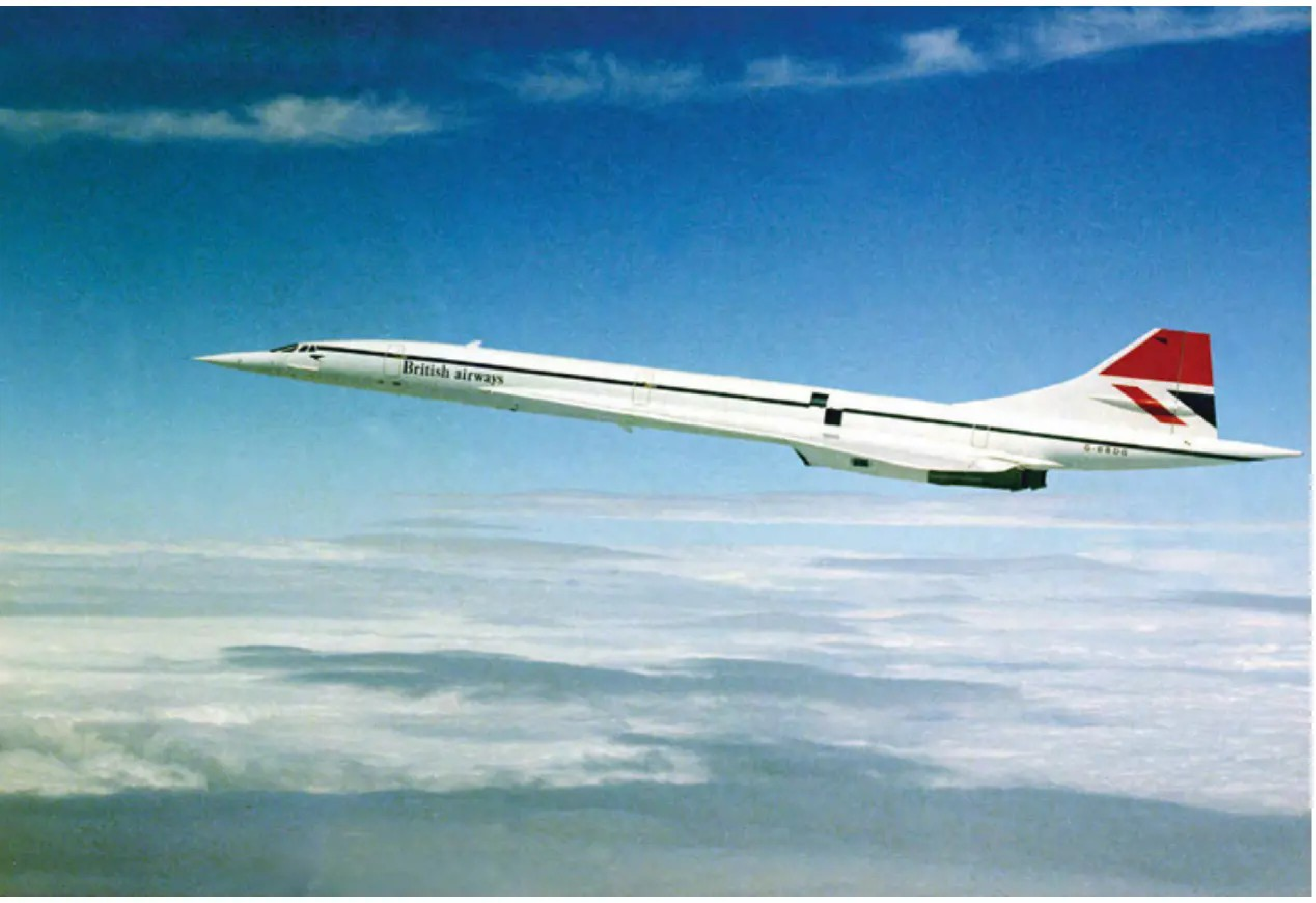
The first parts of what would become 'DG' were laid down at Brooklands in early 1970. Registered to BAC on August 7, 1973, she was built to "near-final production standard." Compared to their predecessors, both 'DG' and its French counterpart, F-WTSB, were different, making it necessary to repeat some test work while working toward that all-important certificate of airworthiness (COA).

That said, like her prototype and pre-production stablemates, 'DG' boasted a flight observer's station in the forward cabin. And although both were considered production aircraft, neither 'DG' nor F-WTSB were pressed into service – both differing massively from the final version specified by the airlines, although not in a way that affected handling or performance. Ultimately it was these two aircraft that did the bulk of the test flying.

One of those watching 'DG' arrive at Fairford that overcast afternoon was programme test pilot Alan Smith: "I was one of a small group of BAC personnel there. 'DG' was accompanied by a Canberra chase. Like everyone watching, I was immediately struck by the aircraft's looks, the extra length of the production fuselage fining out the lines and making it, for me, simply the most beautiful aeroplane ever. I was privileged to fly her many times over the next four years, but as a relatively junior test pilot I had to wait my turn. She was rightly in the hands of the engineers and flight test teams that would smooth her way through the programme to come." By 1974, 'DG' had flown 100 times and undergone numerous modifications and upgrades, helping push Concorde towards certification.

On her fifth flight on February 24, 'DG' crossed the Channel to join F-WTSB at Toulouse. There, French Concorde maestro André Turcat flew 'DG', while Brian Trubshaw flew 'F-WTSB', cross checking the conformity of the two's flying qualities. Entering an intensive period of systems' calibration and testing,

▼ 'Delta-Golf' on a test flight on February 21, 1975 – note the black-and-white flight test photographic calibration markings National Archives and Records Administration



▲ Delta-Golf’ moments from touching down in Doha, Qatar, following a demonstration flight in August 1974 BAE Systems

and handling trials, Concorde flew at Mach 2 for the first time on April 10, her 15th flight. Grounded in May, the aircraft returned in June, having been fitted with upgraded avionics and production-standard Rolls-Royce/SNECMA Olympus 593 afterburning turbojets capable of spewing out an incredible 152,200lbs combined. By then, Britain and France had agreed to build an initial batch of 16 Concordes.

On July 17, she took a day trip to Casablanca in Morocco. Smith recalled: “John Cochrane and I flew ‘DG’ from Fairford to abeam the Canaries and back. My logbook shows we reached Mach 2.12 and flight level 570 during the three-hour 35-minute sortie. I also noted ‘Simply the greatest’. Without doubt it was and a glimpse of things to come. I didn’t know then that I was destined to fly eight of the 10 British Concordes over the next four years, and some 130 hours on ‘DG’. Once I even flew her three times in one day – heady stuff!”

Later that month, she became the first production Concorde to land at Heathrow. A tour to the Middle East for ‘hot soak’ trials, sales pitches and public relations followed, ‘DG’ visiting Iran, Kuwait, Qatar, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Oman and Bahrain through August. On August 17, she became the first aircraft to carry 100 passengers at Mach 2.

On September 3, she left Bahrain for runway response trials in Singapore, some 3,462nm away – the furthest Concorde had then flown, ‘DG’ covered it in around 3hrs 30mins, flying 3hrs 4mins at supersonic – the longest yet clocked. Returning to Fairford on September 13, she was ferried to Heathrow at the request of the British Airport Authority, to confirm compatibility with ground installations and procedures, with numerous handling and manoeuvring exercises being carried out at Stands J2 and J4 at Terminal 3. Four days later, she arrived in Casablanca with F-WTSB for six weeks of certification tests, with the outbound flight being her 99th foray into the skies.

Why Casablanca?

Not only did Casablanca offer easy access to the highly sought after cold stratospheric conditions found across the South Atlantic, but the unobstructed terrain around the airport made it perfect for noise measurement work. Specialising in air intake development, Smith was involved in several detachments to North Africa with ‘DG’: “We flew south to find the cold upper air near the

▼ Peter Baker and Roy Radford ease ‘Delta-Golf’ into Filton for the final time on December 24, 1981 Courtesy of Brooklands Museum

AEROSPATIALE
BRITISH AEROSPACE
G-BBDG

▲ G-BBDG parked outside Filton's enormous Brabazon Hangar sometime after being 'stood down' in mid-1982 KEY Collection

equator. On a typical flight we would head out to sea and be supersonic about nine minutes from lift-off. Our route took us south, tracking between the Canary Islands and the African coast, levelling off at 50,000ft and cruising at Mach 2.0.

"The test would involve the flight engineer taking manual control of the engine intake ramps and progressively inching them open until the engine surged. That point was noted and recorded by test engineers, and the exercise repeated as the flight conditions, height, speed, air temperature, aircraft weight and so on, changed. Eventually these surge points were computed and used in the ramp's automatic digital control

"An engine surge, although not pleasant, was really no big deal. However, when the aircraft yaws through loss of thrust, a sympathetic surge could be set off in the engine which shares the nacelle – and that was more noticeable. Now, if it wasn't your day and all four engines joined in, you had a truly focusing incident! I would be less than honest if I failed to confess it was rather frightening, if happily uncommon. Although we had no engines damaged, our French colleagues had a different experience when ramps were destroyed and an engine significantly harmed on one of their test flights.

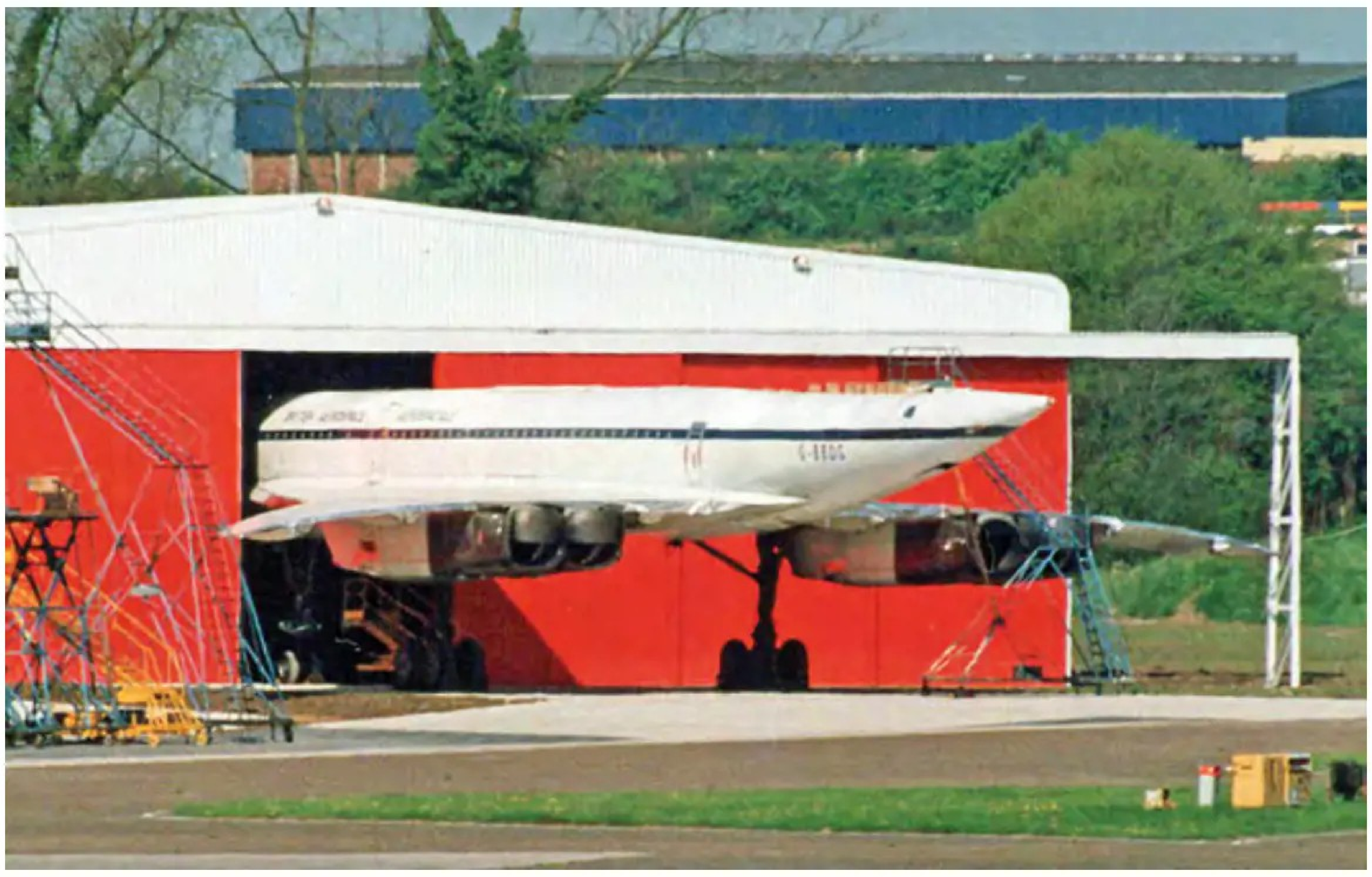
"Normally we would end our southerly track at about 14° north of the equator and then turn about on our return to Casablanca. The cold upper air we sought was certainly achieved; I personally saw skin temperatures of -83°C and +118°C– all this in shirtsleeves!"

On December 18, the jet returned to Fairford. Over the next few years, 'DG' continued with an extensive flight test programme for the purposes of engineering tests and the verification of modifications, further certification work and crew training, as well as public relations and promotional works.

Milestone marathons

On April 2, 1975, G-BBDG completed her 200th flight with a 1hr 28 min subsonic cruise performance test flight; her 250th on June 19 coincided with the start of flight crew training for BA – eight captains and eight flight engineers getting their first chances to tame the supersonic beast in the circuit at nearby Brize Norton. August 11 saw her 300th sortie, a 1hr 53 min supersonic flight to carry out strain gauging of the number 3 engine. September 9 entailed bird impact tests for the UK Civil Aviation Authority at Fairford. The following day, she was ferried to BA's engineering facilities at Heathrow for a ground run in a its newly constructed 'hush house'. March 25, 1976, involved a 6hr 34min transit flight to Cape Town, 5hrs 20mins at supersonic. Her 400th flight on May 20, 1975, was a ferry flight from Casablanca to Fairford. With the closure of the Fairford test base, 'DG' was ferried to Filton on November 30, 1976, from where any further test flying would be continued.

▼ A rare view of 'Delta-Golf' outside her dedicated hangar on the north side of Filton. The structure was designed for the jet to be stored minus the tail fin – effectively halving the cost to build it KEY Collection



By then, Concorde had received its COA (the French awarding it on October 9, with the British having awarded it on December 5 the previous year) and entered commercial service with both nation's national carriers. Smith recalled: "With Concorde's introduction into British Airways service, the Fairford flight test centre was closed and 'DG' flown to Filton to await its fate."

While new tasks were found for the jet, sorties were few and far between. "I was lucky to be included in another detachment to Casablanca in 1978," said Smith: "These tests resulted in the modification of the intake that gave decided performance improvements, including an increase in payload readily adopted by the airlines. On that detachment Brian Trubshaw and I flew at Mach 2.21 and 62,000ft, the second-fastest Concorde flight ever!"

What turned out to be the jet's last foray into the skies occurred on December 24, 1981. With test pilots Peter Baker and Roy Radford at the controls, 'DG' – dressed in BA colours – flew in and out of Filton almost unnoticed. Smith recounted: "In some ways, rather like her arrival in 1974, she slipped quietly into retirement at Filton on Christmas Eve 1981. I was the only person standing by the end of the runway to witness this rather emotional and signal event."

Incredibly, it's said that the last flight was on behalf of the Ministry of Defence to see if a supersonic jet that size heading towards the UK from the west would be visible on radar – a test against the emerging threat of Russia's Tupolev Tu-160 Blackjack bomber. That said, the test logs show that G-BBDG's last flight was related to primary nozzle control development work, a planned post entry into service development area.

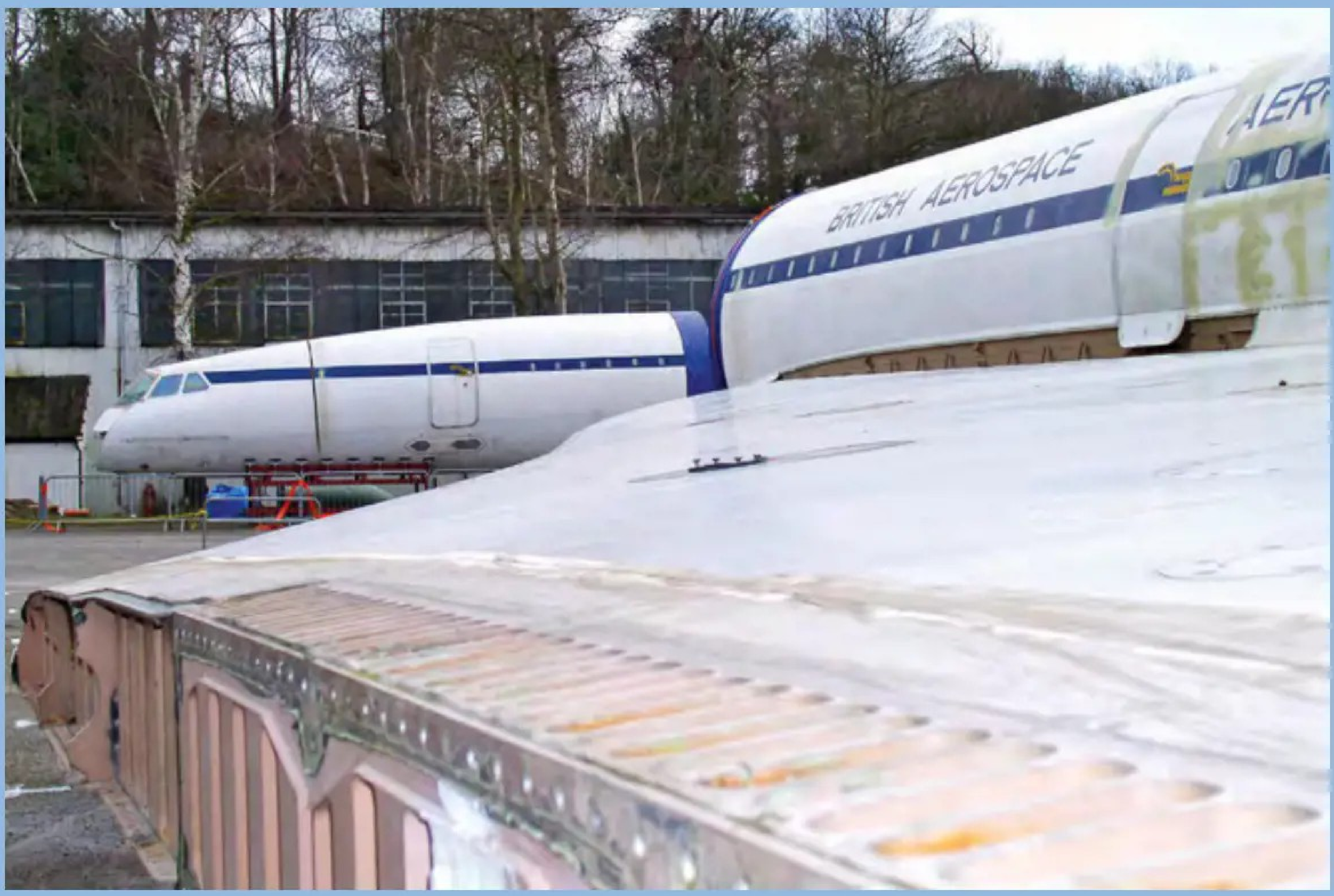
Into retirement

Initially, 'DG' was stored in a state of semi-airworthiness inside Filton's colossal Brabazon Hangar, the very place she had come together some 30 years before. If needed, she could be made airworthy in just two weeks. But as the days turned to weeks, weeks to months, it was clear her flying days were over. In mid-1982. 'DG', her BA colours long gone, was stood down and towed outside. Parked almost out of sight, this rather sad looking and forgotten figure's weathered appearance wasn't helped when she was cocooned in a Dri-Clad bag to protect her from further deterioration. It proved unsuccessful and water managed to get inside, causing condensation. The bag was removed and she was left at the mercy of the elements.

Although strictly a test airframe, BA used her for spare parts when needed. But when the carrier bought the airframe outright in April 1984, it became its primary source of spares. Until then, BA had been

◢ 'Delta Golf sits at Brooklands museum in in its current glory. Jamie Ewan

▼ 'Delta-Golf' ready to be cut up and disassembled at Filton for the move to Brooklands in April 2004 Neil Walker-The Concorde Project



▲ **The forward and centre fuselage sections of 'Delta-Golf' shortly after arriving at Brooklands in June 2004** Neil Walker-The Concorde Project

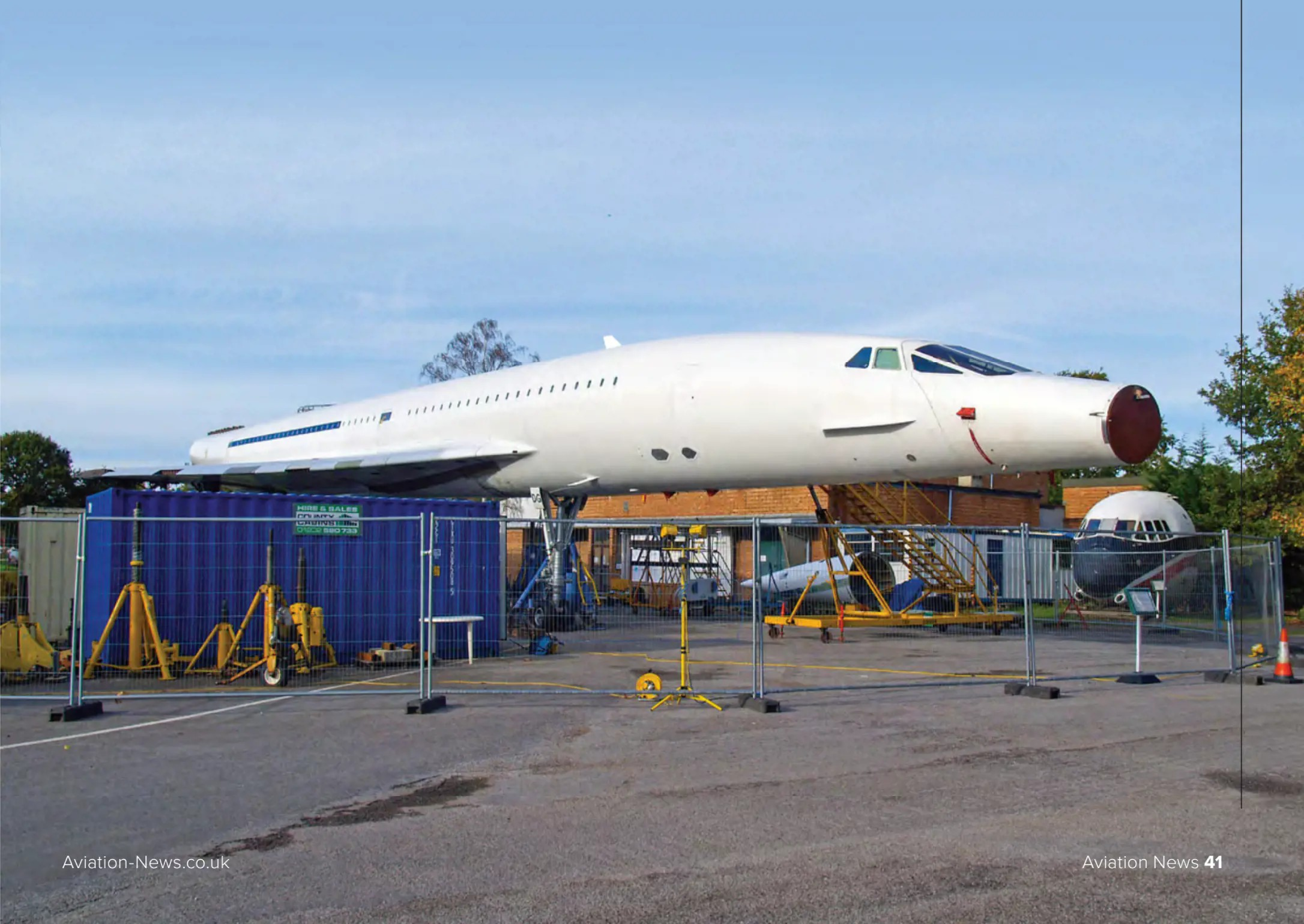
operating six of its seven Concordes commercially. The seventh, G-BOAG, then just four years old, had become a 'Christmas Tree' to support the fleet. With 'DG' on their books, G-BOAG was freed up for revenue work.

To protect its investment – and keep prying eyes away of what was becoming an eyesore – BA funded a purpose-built hangar at Filton. In 1988, minus her tail, 'DG' was eased into what was dubbed the 202 Hangar. And there she remained until 2001, work on the hangar dictating the jet's temporary relocation. By then, 'DG' was missing her droop nose, engines, landing gear components and most of the hydraulic systems.

In November 2002, she was towed back into the Brabazon Hangar for the trial fitting and testing of a new strengthened cockpit door needed in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks on the US. Less than a year later, she had been removed from service and, on October 30, 2003, just six days after BA closed its supersonic chapter, the carrier confirmed 'DG' was being offered to Brooklands. While this led to legal, regulatory, technical, financial and commercial battles just to get her there, she was dismantled and delivered back home in June 2004. There, a two-year effort commenced to return G-BBDG to her former glory.

Looking over the jet on November 17, 2024, half-a-century on from her first flight and 20 years since she arrived back at the home of Concorde, she's still in a class of her own.

The author would like to thank Brooklands Museum and Neil Walker of The Concorde Project for their help in writing this feature. For more information on how you can see 'Delta Golf', visit www.brooklandsmuseum.com/concorde. For more on her epic restoration, see www.concordeproject.com



▼ **The restoration of 'Delta-Golf' was a "million-pound project" that helped to secure 'her' long-term future** KEY Collection

ARMÉE DE L'AIR
DE L'ESPACE

AVIATION NEWS

A pair of French Air and Space force Rafale Bs assigned to EC 02.004 'La Fayette' soaring the clouds of the Baltic skies during a training mission.
This is the first time that the twin-seater variant of the Rafale has conducted an air policing mission in the Baltic region.
Giovanni Colla

Competition to win a special prize coming soon...

29801
DANGER
KEEP AWAY
FORÇA AÉREA PORTUGUESA

HAWKS TO A FLAME

Joe Campion sat down with Major Joao Ines, Commanding Officer of Portugal's new firefighting squadron, to find out how ESQ551 'Panteras' is shaping up to its future task with UH-60 Black Hawks

▲ **The first Portuguese Black Hawk made its maiden flight in the US on August 18, 2023. Here 01 can be seen flying over the coast near Ovar Air Base, Aveiro District, Portugal** Simon Pearson-Cougill

▲ Two of Esq551 UH-60 Black Hawks hover in formation in Portugal's Serra da Estrela mountain range. This is a location hit by wildfires and will most likely be a key area of action for Esq551 Joe Campion

"We are eager for action, but taking unhurried, sure steps to be ready when the time comes to deploy, to perform," Maj Joao Ines, Esq551 CO

Wildfires are a growing concern in Western Europe, so in 2022 an agreement valued at €43m was signed between the Força Aérea Portuguesa (FAP, Portuguese Air Force) and Arista Aviation Services (now United Aero Group) in Alabama, USA, for six reconditioned UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters to serve as firefighting platforms. The Portuguese Government wanted to have its own resources for fighting wildfires across the country and handed this responsibility over to the FAP, which will use the UH-60 in addition to and in co-operation with private companies. The FAP co-ordinates preparation on the ground and also in the air, currently with the AW119 Koala, which performs surveillance and soon the UH-60, will also fight fires.

The FAP will fly its fleet with a Bambi Bucket and Bambi Max (around 3000L) attached to a long line. Ines said: "There are multiple configurations that will be tested for our helicopters in the future, including belly tanks."

The contract included the UH-60As, training for six pilots (two at instructor level), 27 mechanics and three years of scheduled maintenance services. United Aviation Group, in partnership with ACE Aeronautics, took the ex-US Army helicopters with a substantial potential of flight hours and years left to

▶ Confined landings is part of the Black Hawk training syllabus for Portuguese Air Force pilots, seen being practiced here by a crew just in a location outside home base Simon Pearson-Cougill

ensure the longevity of the fleet and converted them into an ACE deck with Garmin G5000H avionics suite installed. The first Portuguese Black Hawk completed its maiden flight in the US on August 18, 2023, displaying the US registration, N669JH and FAP serial 29801.

Since the original 2022 agreement, Portugal has increased its total number of Black Hawks to nine, ordering three more UH-60L variant Black Hawks in September 2024 via ACE Aeronautics (also in Alabama), with the more powerful T701 engines. These additional three L variants should be delivered across 2025 and conclude deliveries of all ordered Back Hawks by 2026. The UH-60Ls from Ace will also include the Ace Deck G5000H with touchscreen controls, geo-referenced IFR approach charts, satellite communications, and inflight weather data with colour weather radar. Additionally, the main and tail rotor blades will be overhauled by Aviation Blade Services to like-new condition.

▲ Esq551 Commanding Officer Maj Joao Ines in the cockpit of one of the squadron's UH-60s. Joe Campion

▶ The squadron are expecting a total of nine UH-60 Black Hawks. The CO is expecting to reach IOC in November 2025 and Full Operational Capability (FOC) is predicted for November 2027 Simon Pearson-Cougill

FORÇA AÉREA PORTUGUESA
29801

▼ Ovar AB in Northern Portugal was chosen by leadership due to the short transit time to the nearby mountains susceptible to wildfires in hot summers Simon Pearson-Cougill

FORÇA AÉREA PORTUGUESA
29801

A squadron reborn

At the time of writing, three of the original six UH-60As have been delivered to the FAP and they are operated by members of ESQ551 'Panteras'. Esq551 was created in 1978 operating the Alouette III until September 1986 when it was disbanded. The FAP reactivated the unit to fly the UH-60.

Their location at Ovar AB (BA8) in Northern Portugal was chosen because it is in the part of Portugal where wildfires are most likely to occur. The entire base is being reconfigured and receiving new capabilities to accommodate the squadron. "A maintenance hangar is being completely refurbished, and a squadron building is being made from scratch," Ines explained. "With the increase in human resources, new support infrastructures are planned, such as lodging for the military and their families."

▲ Ines was astonished by the sturdiness and stability of the helicopter. The “beefed up” landing gear allows it to positively land in harsh terrain Joe Campion

◥ Since the original 2022 agreement, Portugal has increased its total number of Black Hawks to nine, ordering three more UH-60L variant Black Hawks in September 2024 via ACE Aeronautics in Alabama Simon Pearson-Cougill

▼ Pilot Cruz executes a one-wheel landing while training on the Black Hawk. Currently operating the three Black Hawks are eight pilots and three crewmen Joe Campion

The three current Black Hawks were delivered in October and November 2023, and one just prior to Christmas in 2024. Interestingly, they were ferried from the US to Portugal via another new asset of the FAP, the Esq506-operated KC-390, home based at Beja AB (AB11), 100km north of Algarve. It is worth noting the KC-390 (serial 26901) was only in service for two weeks when it performed the first delivery mission. It saw both squadrons work closely together to get the helicopters across the Atlantic to Portugal. It proved two things: the strategic airlift capability of the new KC-390 and the FAP’s ability to deploy the Black Hawk worldwide at short notice.

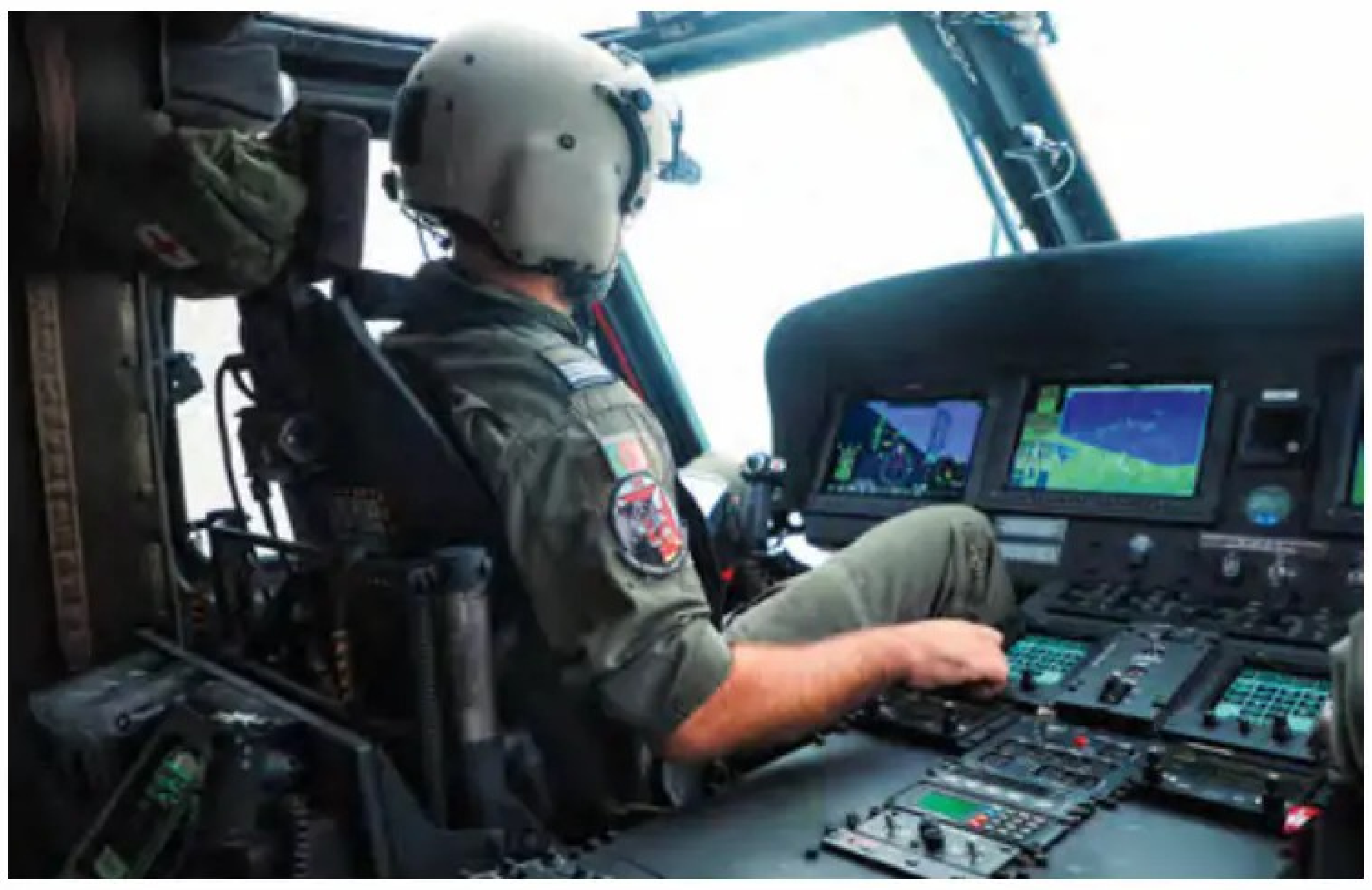
Another Black Hawk is due to arrive at Ovar this spring (2025) and the delivery of the final two of the original six UH-60A is also scheduled for 2025. Currently operating the three Black Hawks are eight pilots and three crewmen. Ines added that the ambition is to have a total of 35 pilots and 17 crewmen serving the nine strong UH-60 fleet.

The first four pilots were trained at US Aviation Training Solutions in Florida between February and April 2023. The next four received theory training in the US but are currently being trained in Portugal both to fly the Black Hawk via an in-house built syllabus and for the Garmin G5000H adaptation training. In terms of other aspects of training, no simulator was included in the contract and Esq551 are currently in the process of building relationships with other Black Hawk operators within Europe to arrange training exercises with the helicopter.

Ines said: “We are expecting Initial Operational Capability (IOC) in November 2025, it comprises an increase in aircraft, aircrew, maintenance members and logistics personnel.” Full Operational Capability (FOC) is predicted for November 2027.

29802
FORÇA AÉREA PORTUGUESA

▲ Four of the current Black Hawk pilots pose in front of one of the unit's machines. The first four pilots were trained in the US at US Aviation Training Solutions in Florida Joe Campion



◥ ACE Aeronautics took the ex-US Army helicopters with a substantial potential of flight hours and years left to ensure the longevity of the fleet and converted them into an ACE deck with Garmin G5000H avionics suite installed Joe Campion

Although the squadron is solely focused on the firefighting mission for now, who knows what may be added to their mission list, since the Black Hawk is an excellent utility helicopter capable of moving troops, search and rescue, and many other tasks.

When the author visited the unit at Ovar, the squadron was close to concluding initial qualification on the helicopter and were performing missions such as formation and confined formation landings, as well as mountain training. Ines explained: "We are starting to train multiple missions now to increase proficiency."

As a passenger aboard the UH-60A, the high level of thorough planning and professionalism going into their training mission was clearly evident. Once airborne, the Esq551 pilots flew the helicopter like they had 1,000s of hours on the Black Hawk.

Flying the Black Hawk

Having previously flown the Alouette III, EH-101 Merlin and AW119 Koala, Joe asked Ines how the Black Hawk compared and he responded "I can say with confidence that the Black Hawk is the most complete, robust and rewarding helicopter to fly of the lot. First time flying it in Florida, March 2023, I was astonished by the sturdiness and stability. The 'beefed up' landing gear allows it to positively land in harsh terrain, while the stability (combined with good power) stands for a noticeable higher cruising speed and it's so easy to fly.

"Performance-wise it brings peace of mind, as when flying fully loaded with personnel and full tanks, the performance is minimally affected."

Although the Panteras are already flying the UH-60 and practicing with Bambi Buckets, the squadron is not due to fight fires until 2026. And looking to the future, the UH-60 is likely to enhance the FAP's capability in more than one area. "We now have an easily deployable platform for conflict or catastrophe relief as well, if required," Ines said.

He concluded: "We are going to aim for continuous improvement, collaborate with the existing platforms and co-ordination teams, and we will add two things: a very capable platform and a highly trained experienced and dedicated crew, as we will train for the mission all year round." AN

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▼ Esq551 was created in 1978 operating the Alouette III until September 1986 when it was disbanded. The FAP reactivated the unit to fly the UH-60 Simon Pearson-Cougill

▲ **A bird's-eye view of a Portuguese Air Force Black Hawk picking up water from a lake with its attached Bambi Bucket** Joe Campion

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A classic to

WHITE DESERT
ANTARCTICA

find the future

Chris Gilligan speaks to Bell Geospace to find out how they are employing a modern take on a true aviation classic to ‘see’ beneath the surface of the Earth in the UK

▼ The Aircraft's vibrant colour scheme is a product of its past taskings in Antartica. Mark Stevens

SPOTLIGHT ON C-GEAJ

Originally constructed as a C-47B by Douglas in Oklahoma City, USA, C-GEAJ has certainly lived an incredibly varied, and at times, hair-raising life! Taken on strength with the United States Army Air Force (USAAF) in 1943 with serial number 43-48859, she went on to see active service with both the Armée de l’Air in France and the South Vietnam Air Force.

The aircraft was eventually transferred back to what had then become the United States Air Force (USAF) in 1968 and was put into long term storage at the famous Davis Monthan ‘Boneyard’ in Tuscon, Arizona. After three decades in storage, the airframe was acquired by Basler Turbo Conversions for conversion and modification to BT-67 standard and was eventually able to take to the skies once more.

The colourful blue/white/red colour scheme with ‘white desert’ livery is due to its time spent operating deep into Antarctica and was chosen for its stark contrast with the landscape found on the continent. The colour scheme is unique among Bell Geospace’s fleet of BT-67s, with the other two (C-FTGX and C-FTGI) wearing a more traditional white scheme with company livery.

It was while operating in Antarctica, on behalf of ALCI Aviation in January 2009, that C-GEAJ suffered extensive damage when it inadvertently descended and flew into the ground in poor contrast and visibility. Although coming to rest upright, the aircraft sustained substantial damage to both turbo engines and propellers, flaps, fuselage underside and landing gear. Due to the remote location of the incident, the aircraft had to be repaired in situ, in extremely inhospitable conditions but unbelievably, was able to fly off the ice and snow to relative safety following completion.

Now, over eight decades on from construction, this venerable airframe can be found conducting state of the art aerial geological work, around the globe, in all weathers. It stands as a true testament to the original design team of Douglas Aircraft Company; a team that produced an all-time aviation classic.

Cornwall is no stranger to deposits of lucrative metals below the surface, with a rich history of tin and copper throughout the county which, at one stage, was responsible for two thirds of the world's supply of copper. As the UK strives towards its target to become 'Net Zero' by 2050, the demand for lithium-ion batteries to power electric vehicles and energy storage systems has sky-rocketed. Currently, the UK is totally reliant on imports of lithium but is looking to become more self-sufficient in the near-future and aims to focus on the environmentally responsible extraction of lithium, including from the historic mining district of Cornwall, but, where to begin?

Initially announced to the local community on December 6, Bell Geospace sought to return to the area with their Basler BT-67 to complete geological surveying, having initially begun work in 2021. The previous visits had seen the aircraft operating out of Southampton airport; therefore, this would mark the first occasion that the aircraft would operate out of Cornwall itself. It was initially planned for the aircraft to be in the area for two to three weeks, taking off just after sunrise, with an expected eight days of good weather required for completion.

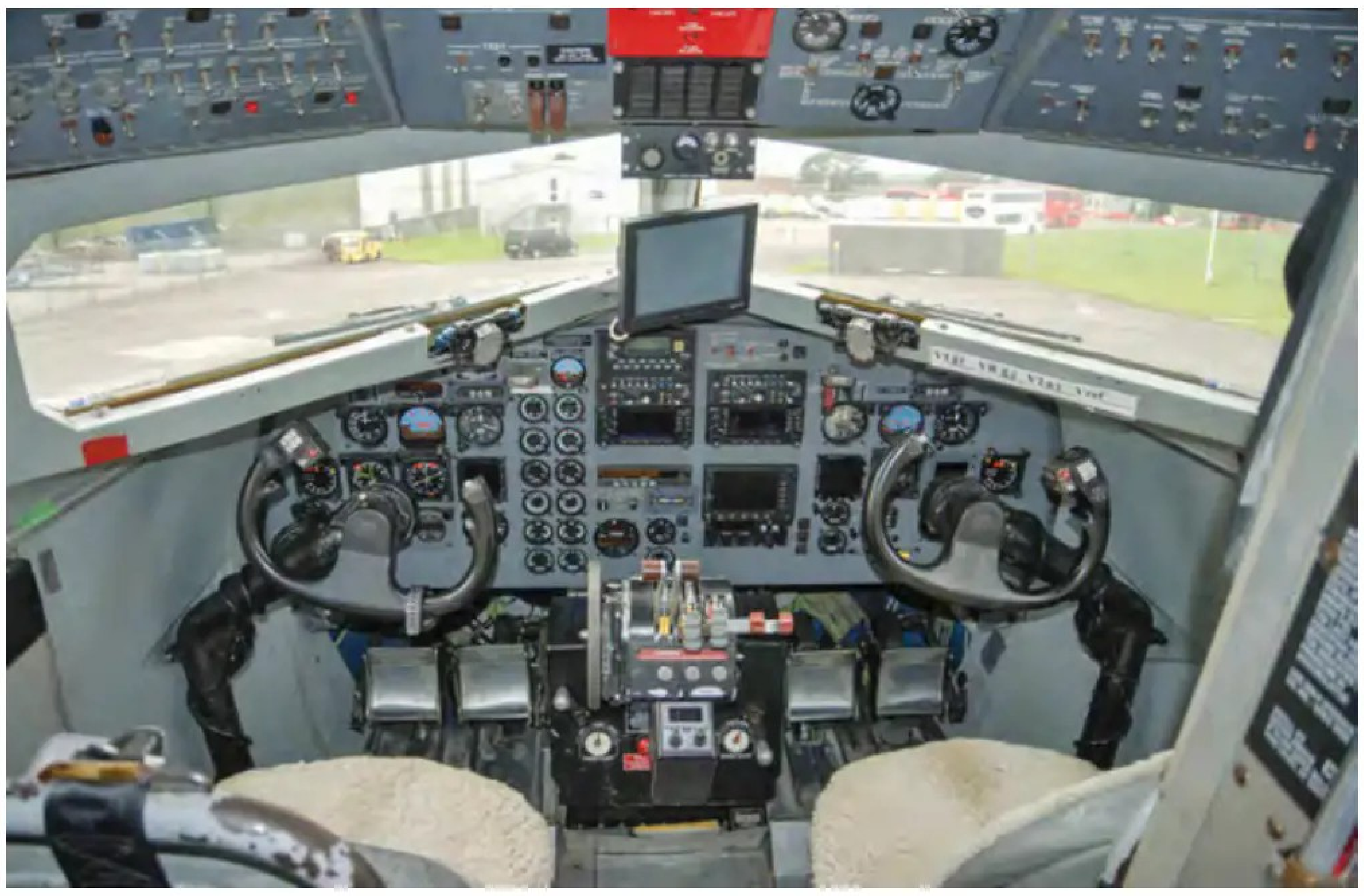
Bell Geospace

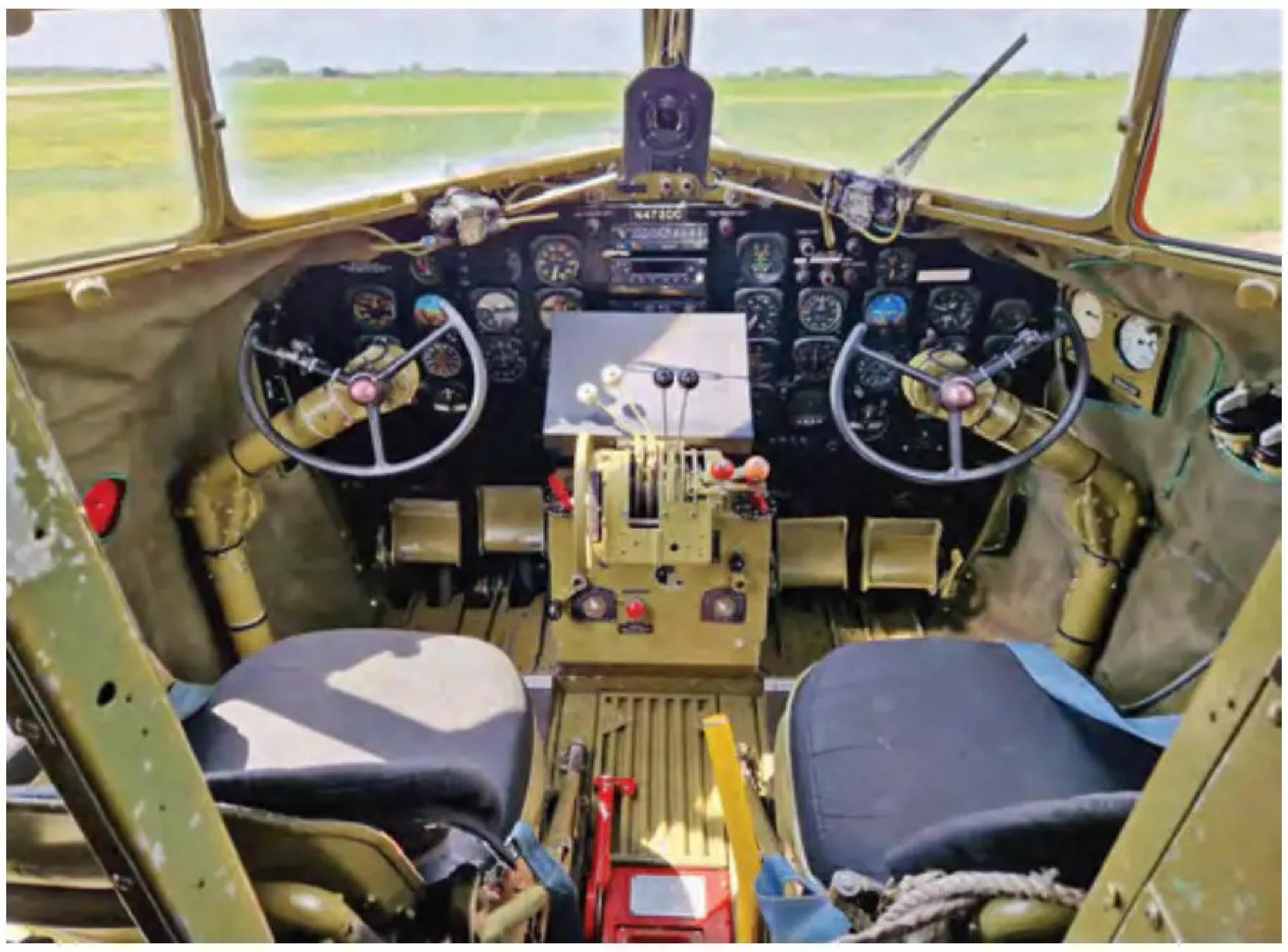
Founded in 1994, Bell Geospace with its HQ in Houston, Texas , is a company who operate a fleet of three Basler BT-67 aircraft that have been specially modified for aerial geological mapping. With an unblemished safety record spanning 26 years of aerial operations and over 530 surveys completed across 50 different countries, they have become world leaders in Gravity Gradiometry. Using Full Tensor Gradiometry (FTG) equipment on-board, the survey aircraft can sense and measure geological properties which cannot otherwise be seen, essentially allowing the aircraft to 'see' through to the Earth's subsurface. Very much like how a compass can measure North passively, the equipment is able to measure these properties without emitting sonar or sounds of any sort. The data acquired throughout the Cornish survey will allow for the creation of geological maps of the area which, in turn, will be used to evaluate geothermal energy and lithium potential in the county.

▲ Evidence of Cornwall's historic mining past could be seen from above during the data acquisition flights Stefan Kuna

Basler BT-67

The company use a platform produced by Basler Turbo Conversions of Oshkosh, Wisconsin. The BT-67 is a re-manufactured and modified Douglas DC-3/C-47 and has become synonymous with scientific research and aerial surveying. The conversion includes the fitting of new Pratt & Whitney PT6A-67R Turboprop engines, lengthening of the fuselage, strengthening of the airframe, upgrading the avionics and making modifications





◣◢ Evident between these two images is the stark contrast between a more 'historic' DC-3 flightdeck (N473DC – *Drag 'em Oot*) and that of the heavily upgraded Basler example Stefan Kuna & Chris Gilligan

▲ Fine winter weather allowed for efficient data capture as well as stunning views of the local landscapes Stefan Kuna

to both the wing leading edges and wingtips. The conversion is so extensive, each aircraft is considered a zero-hour airframe upon completion. Another specific addition to Bell Geospace's fleet is the unmistakable Magnetic Anomaly Detector (MAD) boom fitted to the tail of the aircraft.

Andrew Searle, Field Operations Supervisor at Bell Geospace, explains how it hasn't always been a Basler conducting the work. "As we began operations, we experimented with several different aircraft, including the Cessna Grand Caravan and even a Zeppelin airship.

"These experiences taught us valuable lessons on the challenges of operating aircraft, especially in remote locations. The Grand Caravan, while versatile, had limitations in terms of range and payload capacity. The Zeppelin, though unique, could only fly efficiently in the calmest of conditions and was logistically demanding.

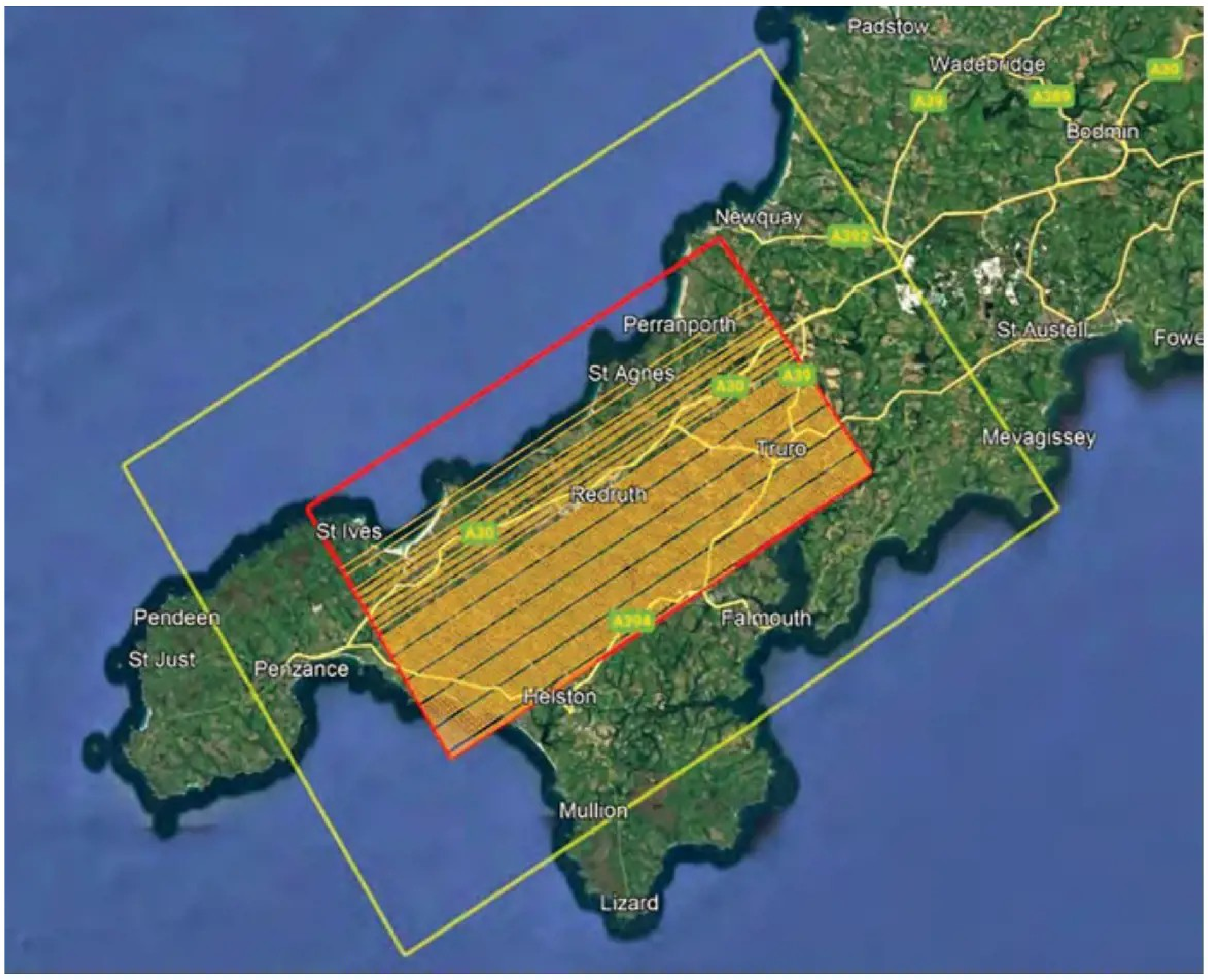
When *Aviation News* asked what makes the Basler the perfect aerial platform for the task, Andrew responded: "In contrast to those aircraft, the BT-67 offers a perfect balance of performance and capability. Its extended range, reliable engines and quiet, upwards facing exhausts, make it ideal for our missions." He summed up by saying: "The spacious cabin accommodates our equipment, spares and tools, while its flexible configuration allows us to adapt to evolving project requirements. The wing design ensures increased stability and therefore improves the quality of our data collection."

Preparing for the task

Before surveying could begin in Cornwall, extensive liaison, planning and preparation took place alongside the acquisition of permits and documentation from the relevant aviation authorities. Extensive maintenance was conducted on the aircraft in Canada, a site visit to Newquay Airport was conducted to ensure suitable parking with access to reliable power (crucial for the equipment on-board), local accommodation and hire vehicles were secured and all required HSE paperwork was raised prior to arrival. It's a lengthy, complex and dynamic task that Andrew likened to "herding cats".

Conducting low level flights, for many hours on

▼ A map of the Cornwall 2025 Survey. The yellow box indicates the aircraft manoeuvring area, the red, the survey boundary, and the orange lines are the actual data lines required Map source: Google Earth



▲ A fine aerial study of another of Bell Geospace's Basler BT-67 fleet, this one in corporate livery and a white colour scheme to reflect heat Bell Geospace

end, has potential to disrupt the local community. However, as part of the initial preparation, Bell Geospace went to great lengths to communicate with those potentially affected. With a big part to play in this, Andrew pointed out: "We are committed to responsible community engagement. We aim to minimise our impact on local communities, livestock and habitats in the areas we plan to fly over.

"We connected with local equine groups, parish councils, wildlife support groups and even model flying clubs. We listened to concerns and were able to adapt our survey acquisition plans accordingly to reduce any potential disturbance."

In fact, those mentioned were even able to communicate via a WhatsApp group, set up to notify locals of the intention to fly, time of take-off and the areas that would be overflown on the day. The effort didn't go unnoticed and was hugely appreciated by those initially concerned, with many enjoying the sight of the aircraft overhead and excitedly feeding back photos and videos of the flight as seen from the ground.

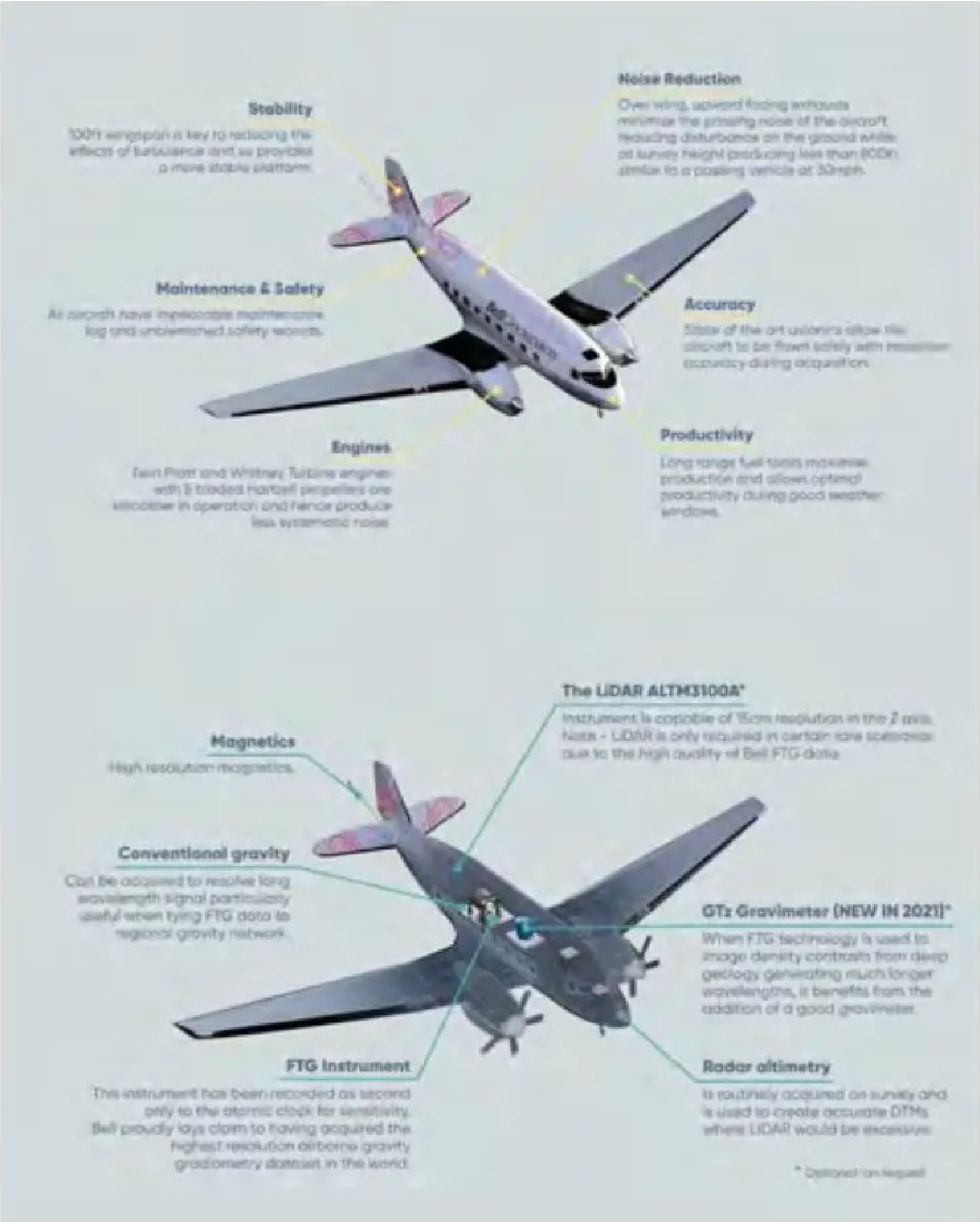
Survey operations

Having departed its home base of Oshawa, Canada, on December 8, C-GEAJ arrived into Newquay on December 12 after a challenging transatlantic flight via Goose Bay, Greenland and Reykjavik, Iceland. Strong head wings meant extended tracks had to be taken to preserve fuel and avoid flying directly into the oncoming wind. It was initially expected for the survey to begin almost immediately, however, the UK winter had other plans, with low cloud and strong winds present for many days and the aircraft sat idle until December 29.

Survey flights are typically flown between 100 and 300m, within visual flight rules (VFR), and chosen carefully to avoid turbulent conditions. This, naturally, can be challenging during a UK winter. "We must carefully consider the optimal timing to balance favourable weather conditions with reduced airspace congestion," Andrew explains. "While offering better weather, summer can be a challenge due to increased air traffic from commercial and recreational aircraft, as well as military operations.

"We opted to conduct this survey during the 'off-

▼ Bell Geospace's BT-67 waiting for the sun to burn off the early morning mist Stefan Kuna


Stability
100ft wingspan is key to reducing the effects of turbulence and so provides a more stable platform.
Noise Reduction
Over wing, upward facing exhausts minimise the passing noise of the aircraft, reducing disturbance on the ground while at survey height producing less than 80Db similar to a passing vehicle at 30mph.
Maintenance & Safety
All aircraft have impeccable maintenance log and unblemished safety records.
Accuracy
State of the art avionics allow the aircraft to be flown safely with maximum accuracy during acquisition.
Engines
Twin Pratt and Whitney Turbine engines with 5 bladed Hartzell propellers are smoother in operation and hence produce less systematic noise.
Productivity
Long range fuel tanks maximise production and allows optimal productivity during good weather windows.
The LiDAR ALTM3100A*
Instrument is capable of 15cm resolution in the Z axis. Note - LiDAR is only required in certain rare scenarios due to the high quality of Bell FTG data.
Magnetics
High resolution magnetics.
Conventional gravity
Can be acquired to resolve long wavelength signal particularly useful when tying FTG data to regional gravity network.
GTx Gravimeter (NEW IN 2021)*
When FTG technology is used to image density contrasts from deep geology generating much longer wavelengths, it benefits from the addition of a good gravimeter.
FTG Instrument
This instrument has been recorded as second only to the atomic clock for sensitivity. Bell proudly lays claim to having acquired the highest resolution airborne gravity gradiometry dataset in the world.
Radar altimetry
Is routinely acquired on survey and is used to create accurate DTMs where LiDAR would be excessive.
* Optional/on request

season' to mitigate these challenges. While weather conditions may be less favourable, past experiences have taught us that there can be productive flying days, with calmer weather, even in winter."

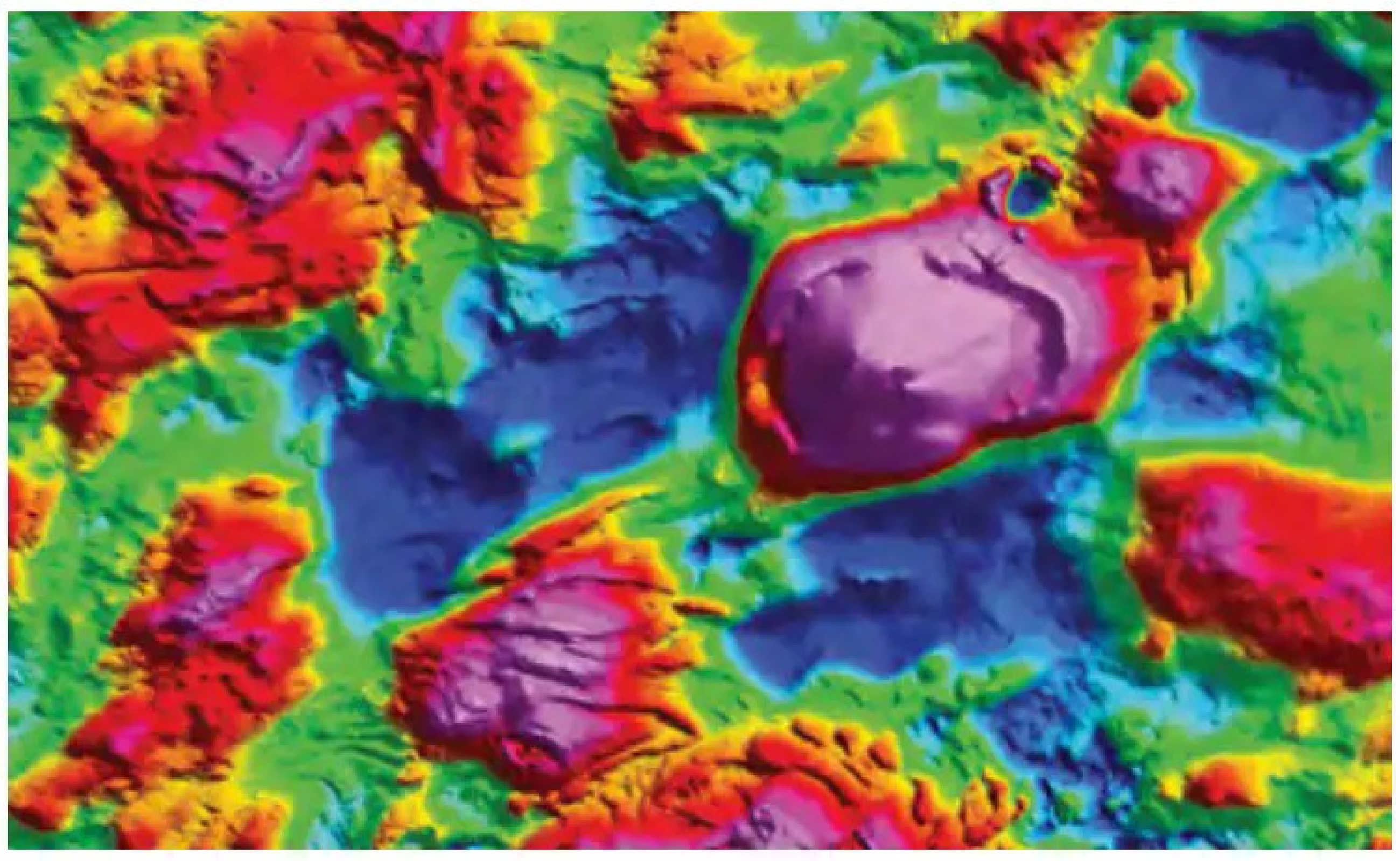
This was to prove the case, when, between January 2 and 3, conditions could not have been better. Clear, cold, and therefore, turbulent-free days allowed for two long endurance, six-hour-plus , survey flights which saw a staggering 80% of the overall data acquisition area covered across the two days. A further flight was conducted on January 9 to complete the initial survey. The perfect conditions were telling, when, on January 13, a mere four lines had to be re-flown and re-recorded to finalise the mission, finishing with a total of four flights as opposed to the initially predicted eight.

Reflection

With the twin turboprops silent and the data processed, Andrew was able to reflect on his career with Bell Geospace. "Meeting people from all walks of life, from local villagers, government officials and even the president of Zambia, has been incredibly rewarding. As has being able to witness the direct impact to communities that follows operations, from investment, job creation, mining and local economic growth.

"I am incredibly fortunate to fly over such breathtaking and contrasting landscapes, often in remote and pristine locations. From the snow coated landscape of Manitoba, Canada at -45°C, through the tropical rainforests of Borneo at +35°C, to witnessing the setting sun over the Saudi Arabian desert." No stranger at all to having to operate in such vast extremes, Andrew quips: "As Billy Connelly and [Alfred] Wainwright aptly observed: 'There is no such thing as bad weather, just the wrong clothing.'"

With the stores, tools and equipment safely loaded on-board, and the aircraft rolling down the Cornish runway for departure, it was onto the next mission for the team of Bell Geospace, secure in the knowledge of a job well done. **AN**



WHITE DESERT

▲ Operating with a small-scale crew, its often 'all hands to the pumps' to ensure the BT-67 is ready to go when required Stefan Kuna

◤ An infographic illustrates the external aircraft adaptations, as well as the technology carried within Bell Geospace

◣ An example image of a geological survey map produced using the FTG technology on-board the aircraft Bell Geospace

▼ Temperatures at -45°C in Thompson, Manitoba, yet survey operations are still able to continue Andrew Searle

The author would like to sincerely thank those at Bell Geospace, in particular, Andrew Searle and Stefan Kuna, without whom this article would not have been possible.

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GREEK MYTHOLOGY

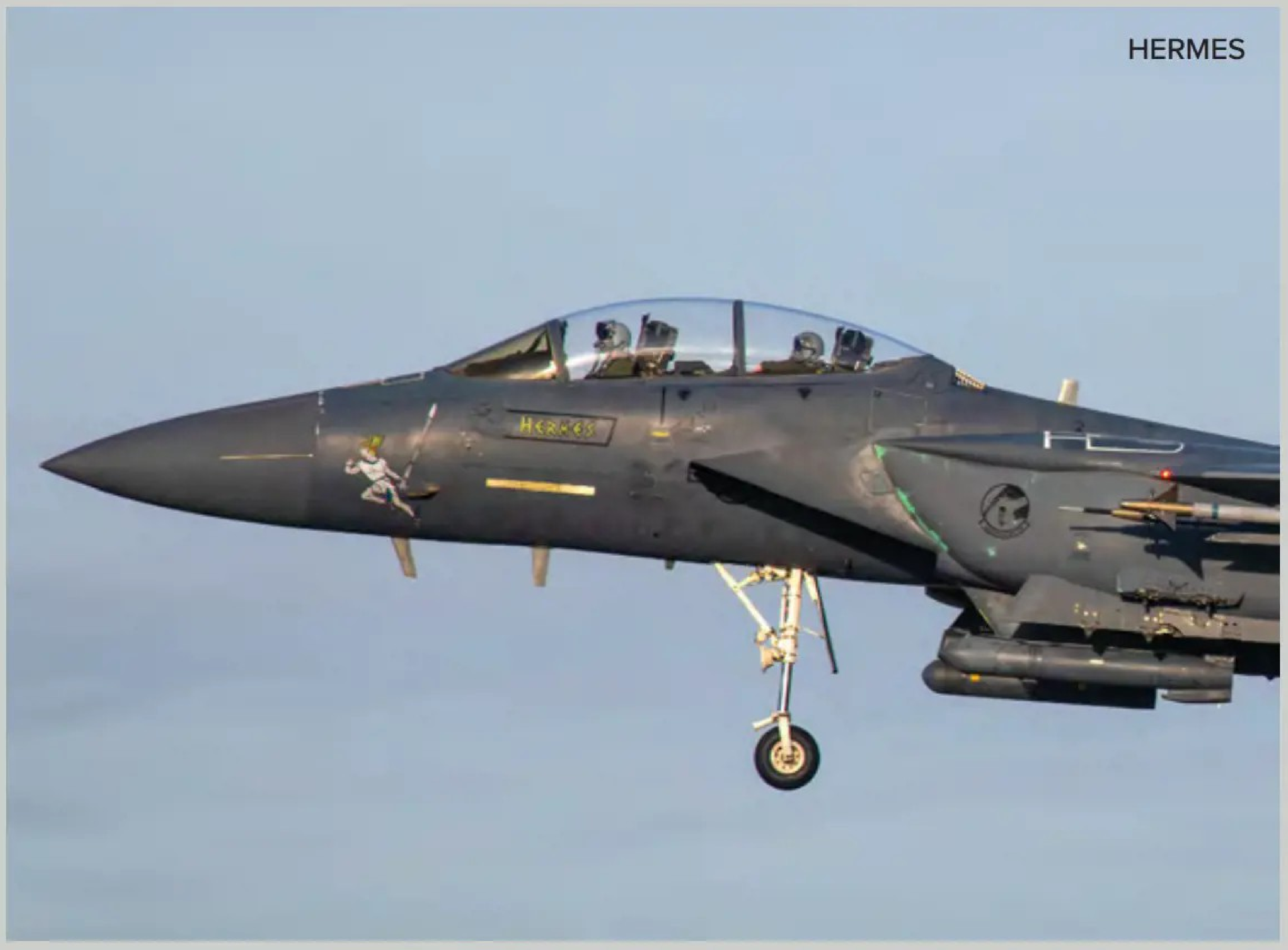
After a three-month stint in warmer climes, 12 F-15E Strike Eagles from the 492nd Fighter Squadron 'Bolars', landed back at RAF Lakenheath in the week leading up to Christmas. **Peter Foster** was there to capture their return

HEPHAESTUS

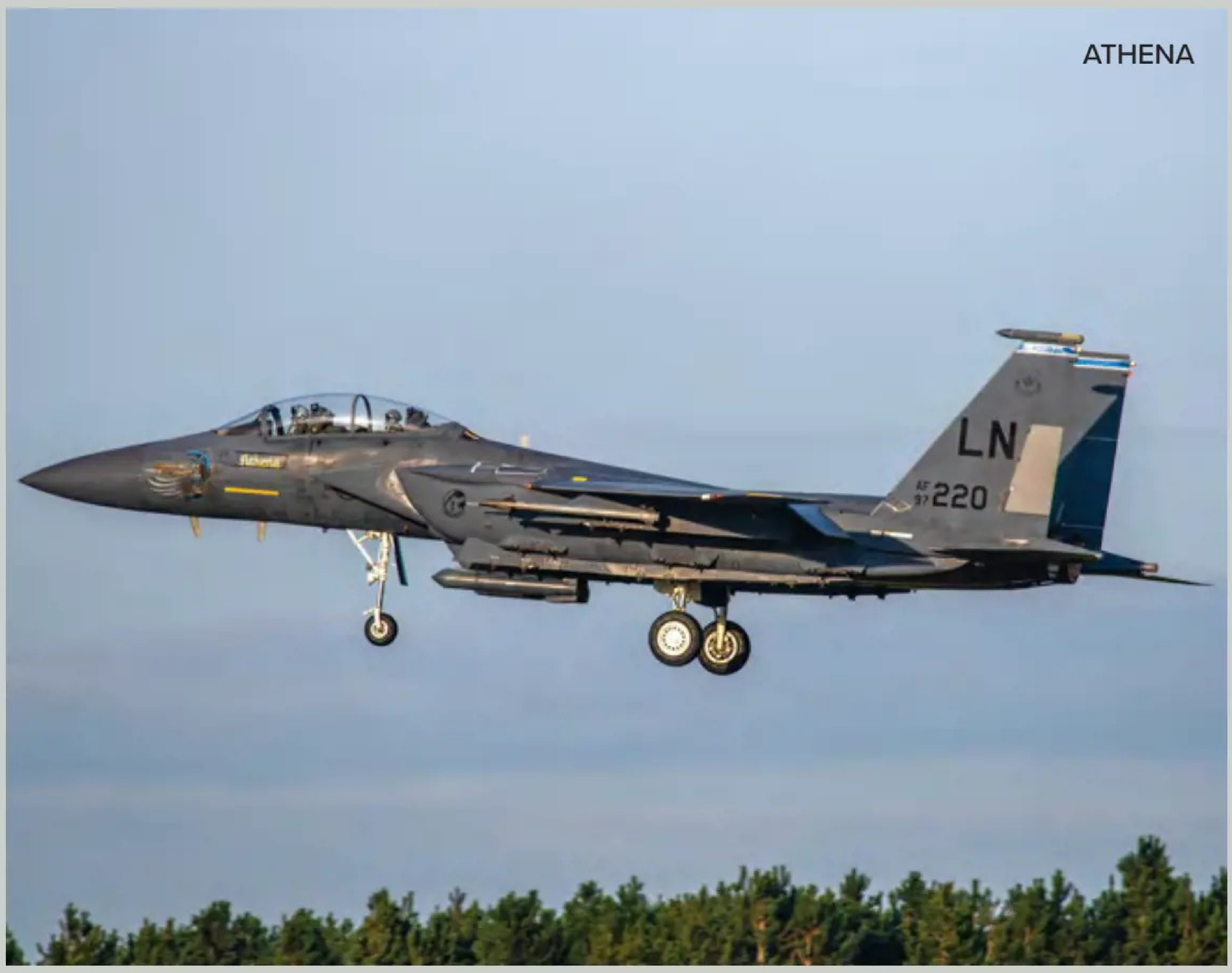
KRONOS Mike Wilson

THANATOS in the low-level. Simon Pearson-Cougill

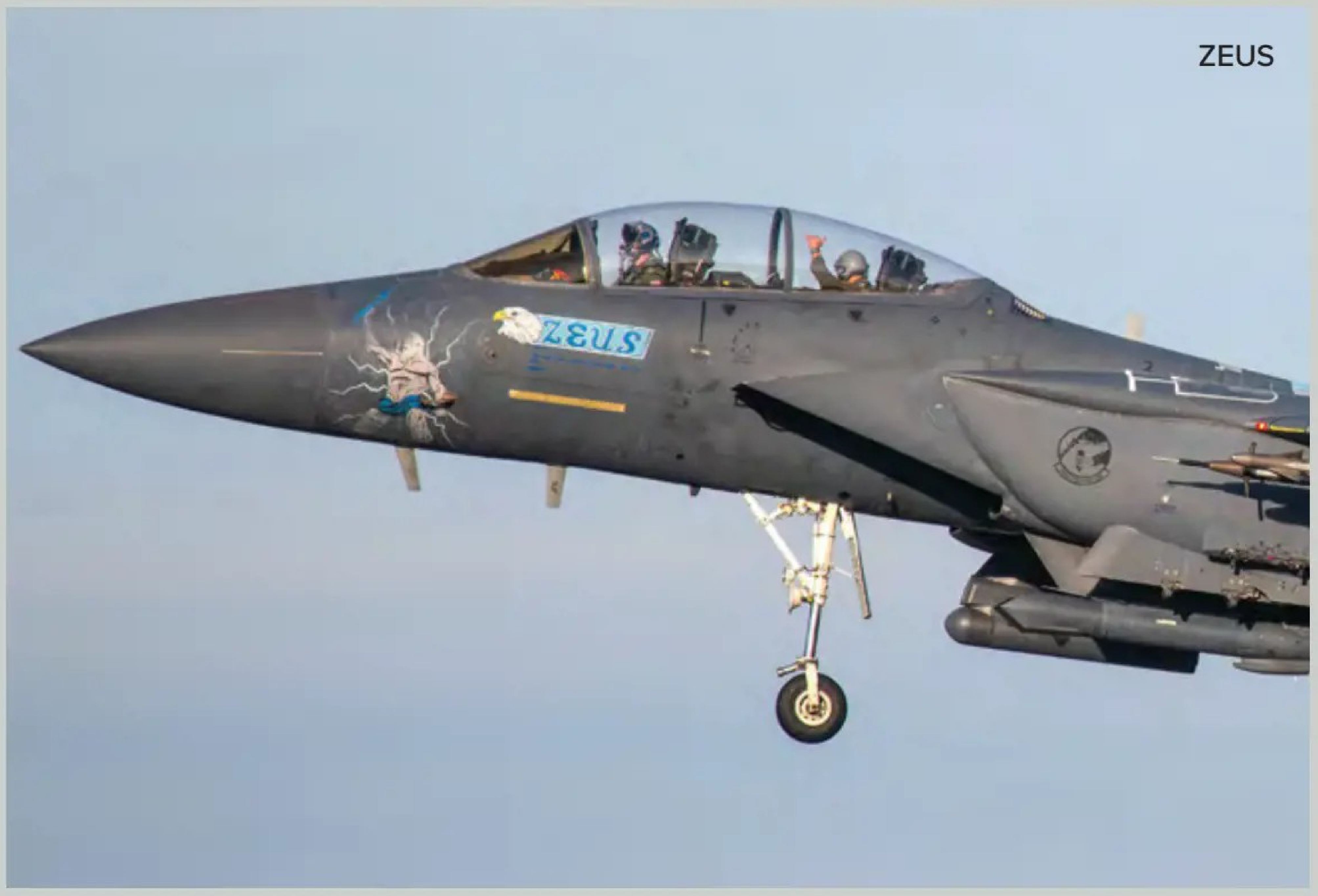
HEPHAESTUS All images Peter Foster, unless stated otherwise



HERMES



ATHENA



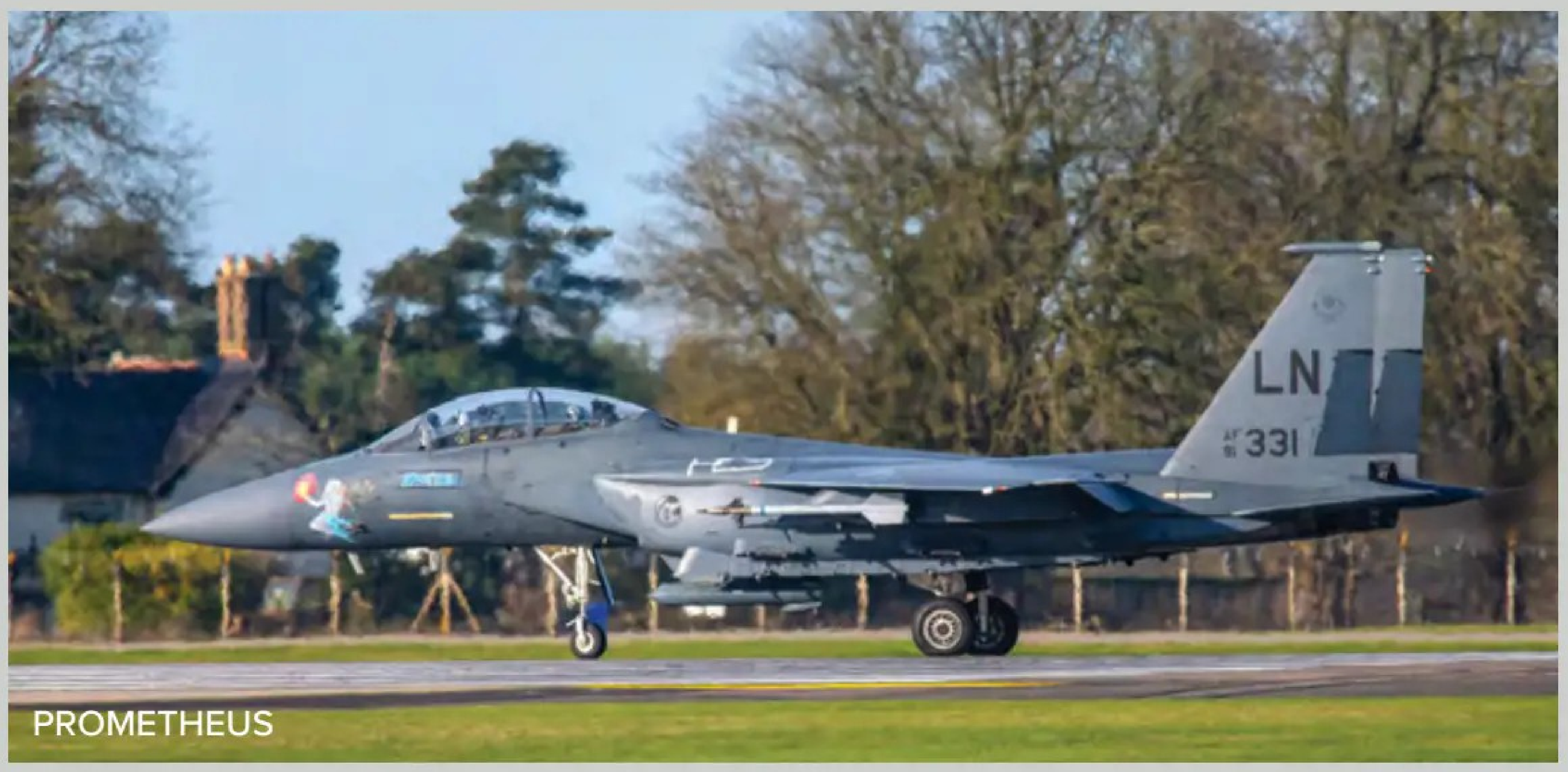
ZEUS

Having deployed to Muwaffaq Salti Air Base in Jordan as part of the US Middle East initiative, the squadron returned in two waves. The first six aircraft returning as ‘Trend 51-56’ on Tuesday December 17 followed two days later by the second cell, ‘Tabor 61-66’.

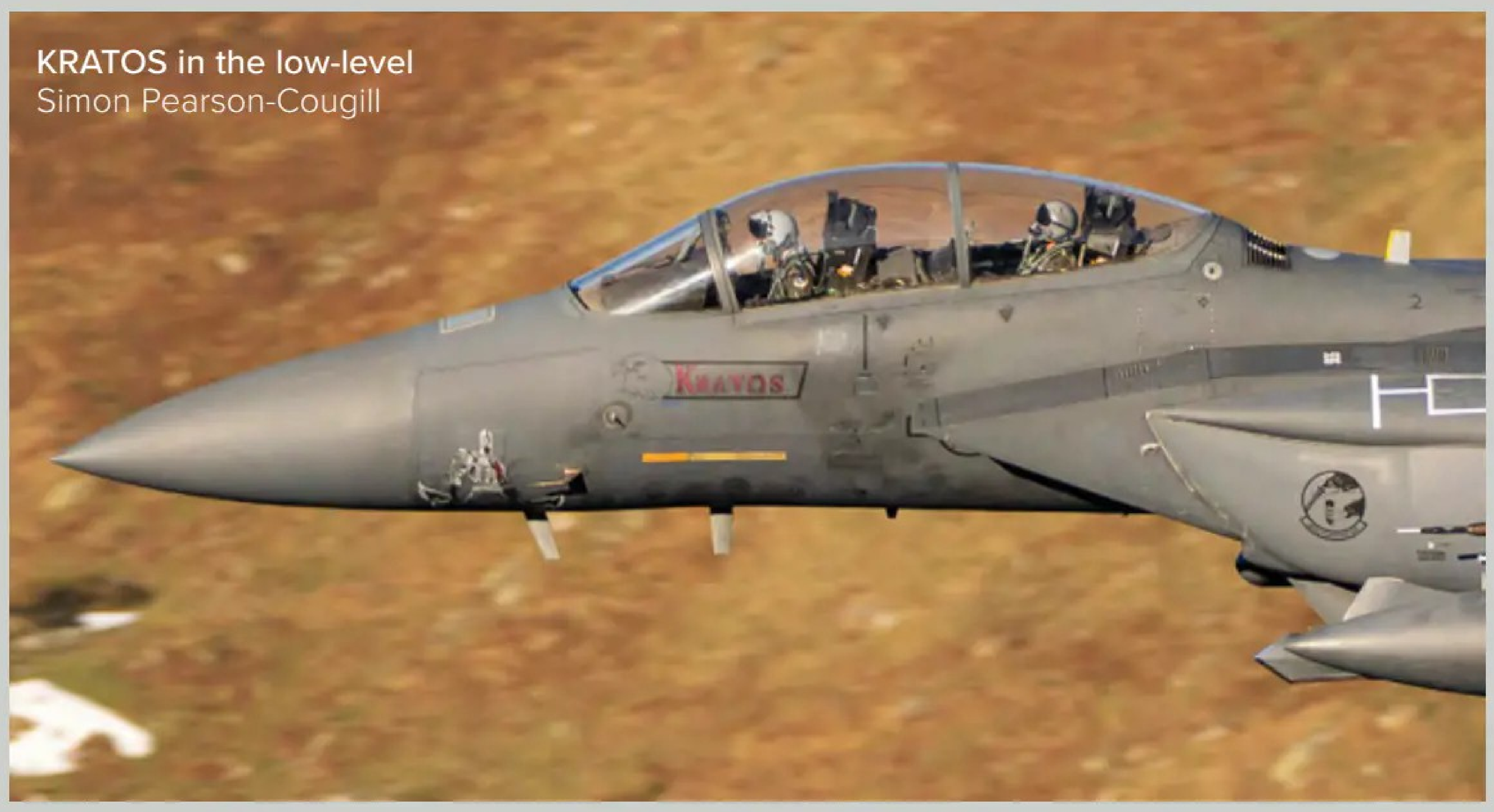
All 12 aircraft carried distinctive nose art, all of which is connected to Greek mythology as can be seen by the list below which is in callsign order.

Tabor 51-56	Tabor 61-66
97-0222 HADES	97-0221 ZEUS
91-0315 APHRODITE	91-0331 PROMETHEUS
97-0219 HERMES	98-0134 ARES
91-0316 KRATOS	97-0220 ATHENA
96-0202 THANATOS	91-0301 KRONOS
91-0302 HEPHAESTUS	97-0218 POSEIDON

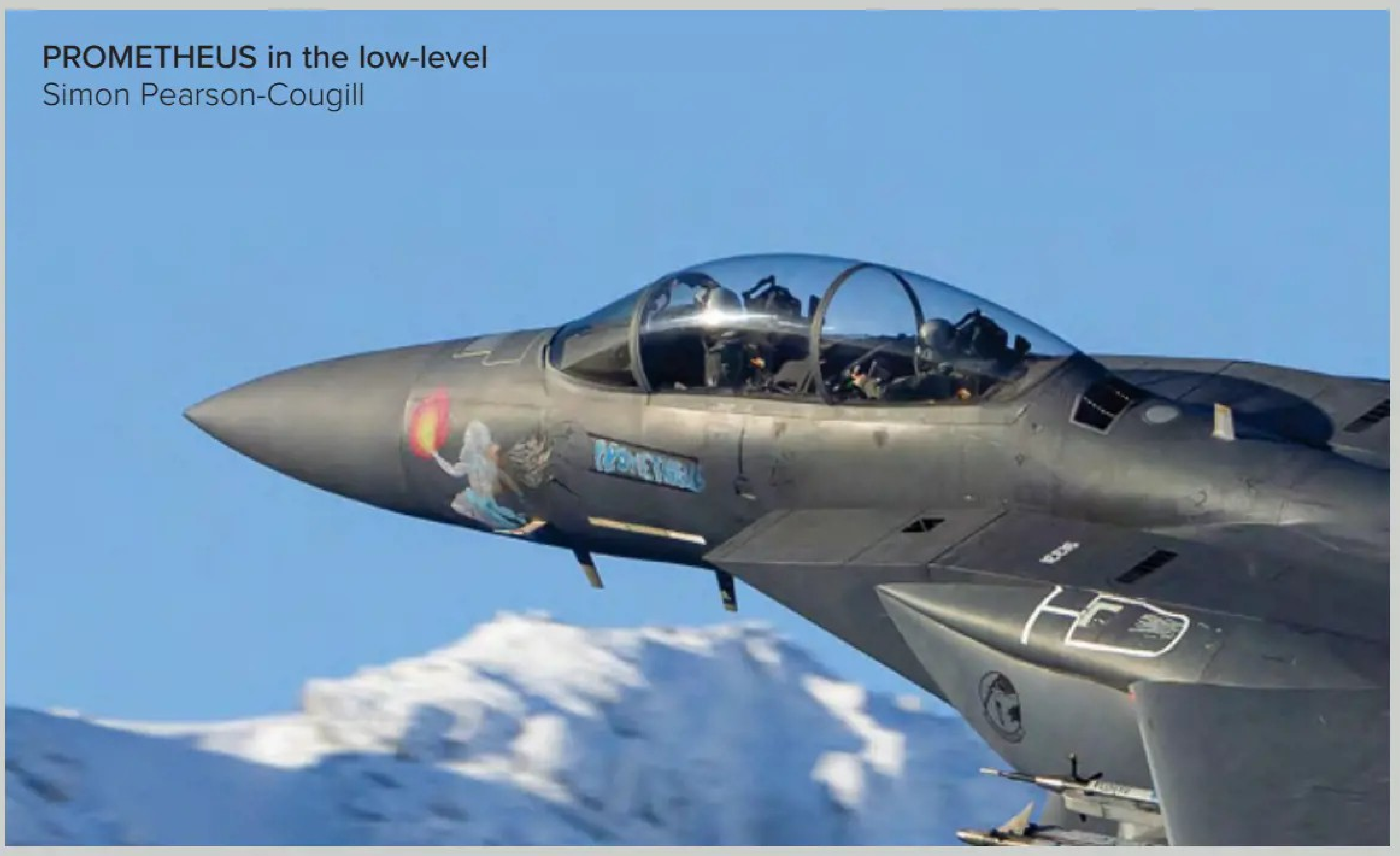
After the festive break all the aircraft returned to normal and intensive training in the first two weeks of 2025, dedicated to General Handling (GH) and Dissimilar Air Combat Training (DACT) with the resident 495th Fighter Squadron.



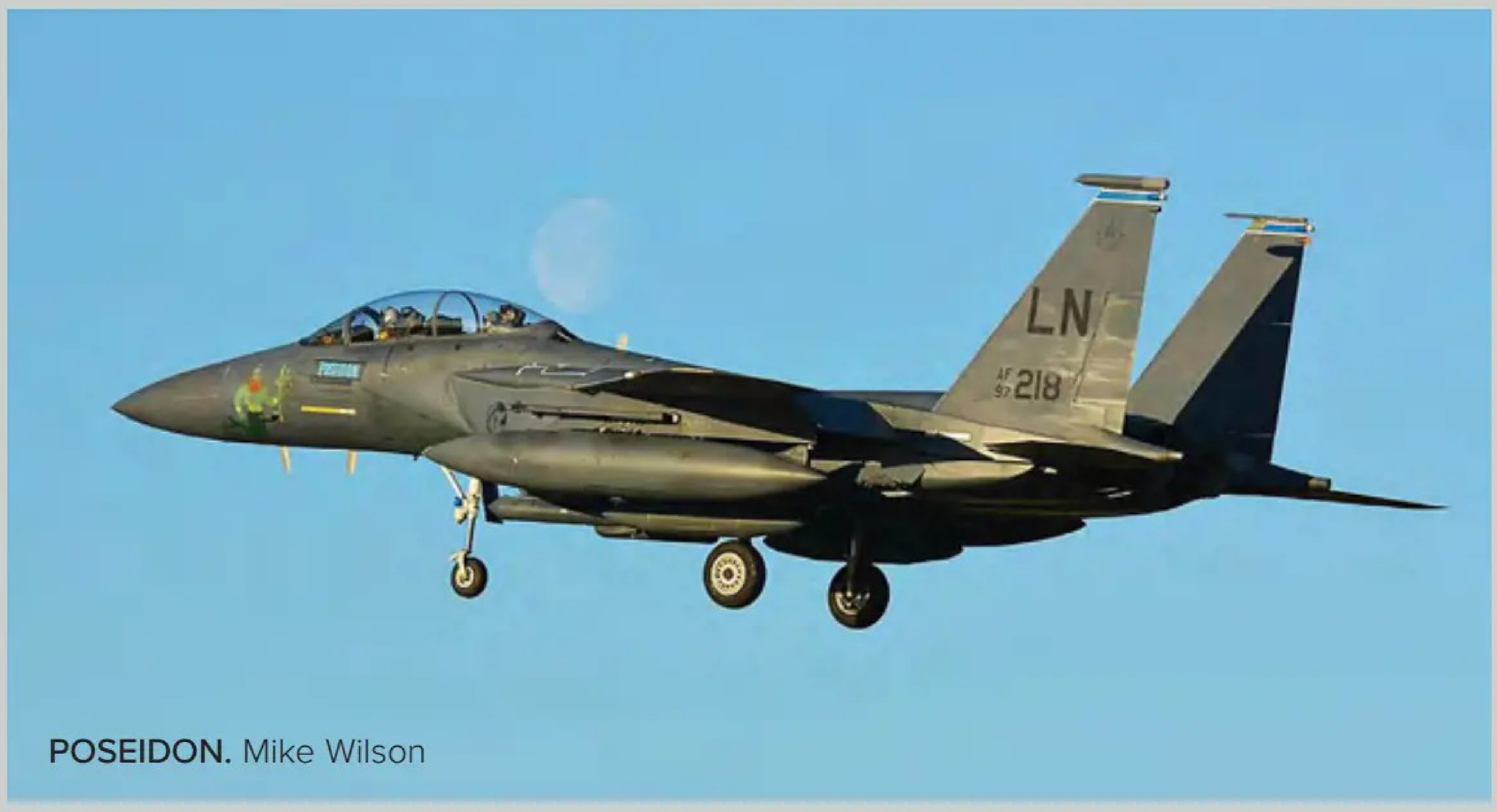
PROMETHEUS



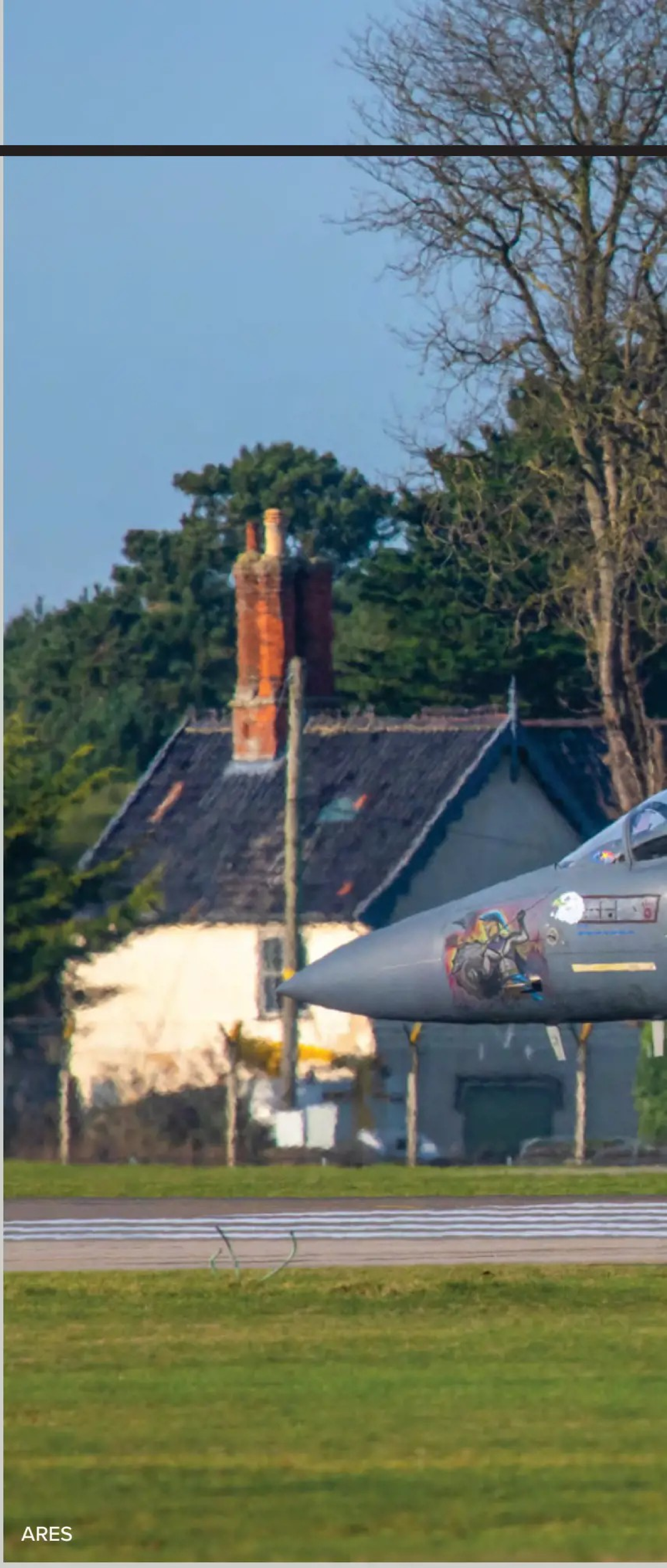
KRATOS in the low-level
Simon Pearson-Cougill



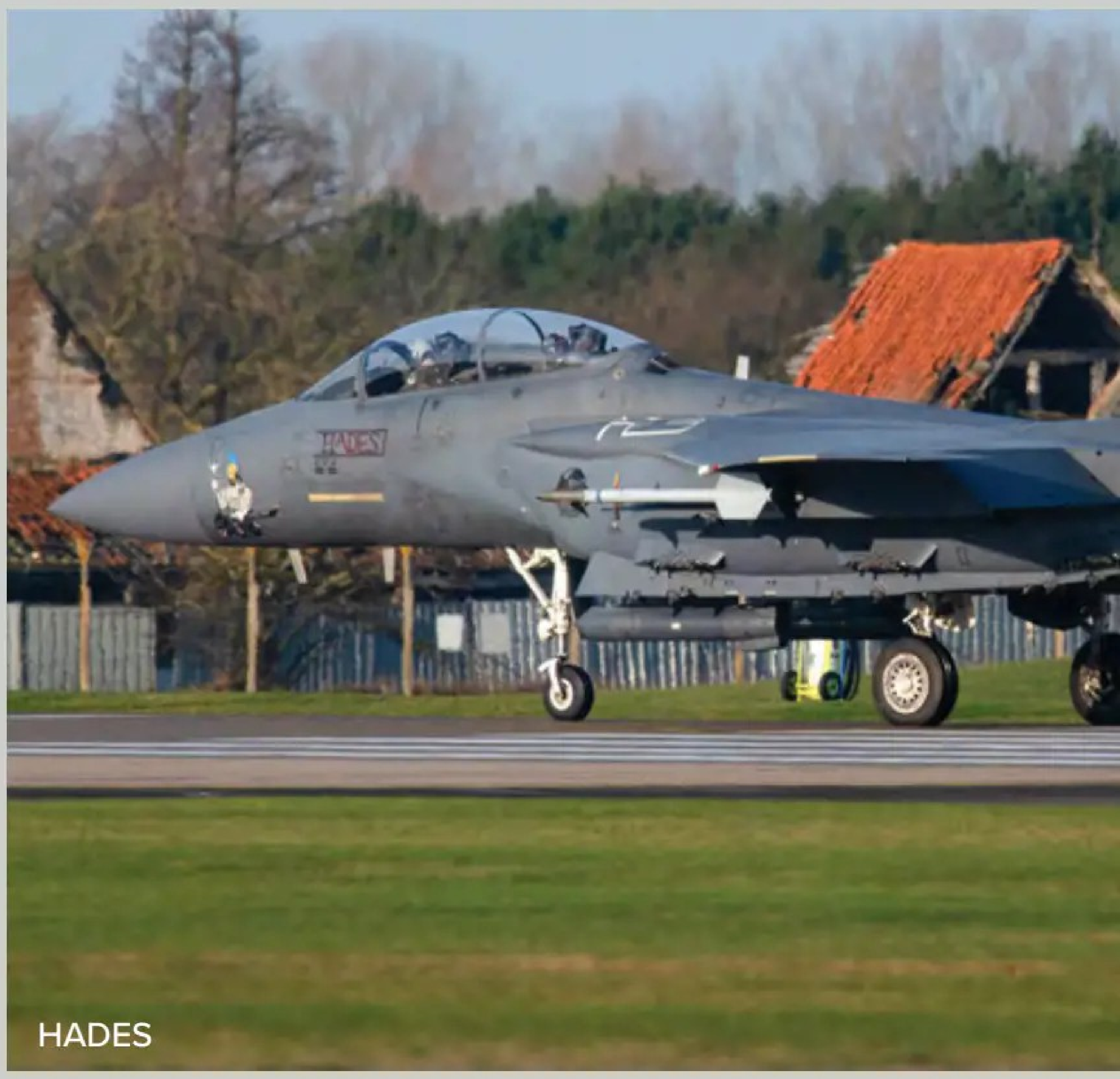
PROMETHEUS in the low-level
Simon Pearson-Cougill



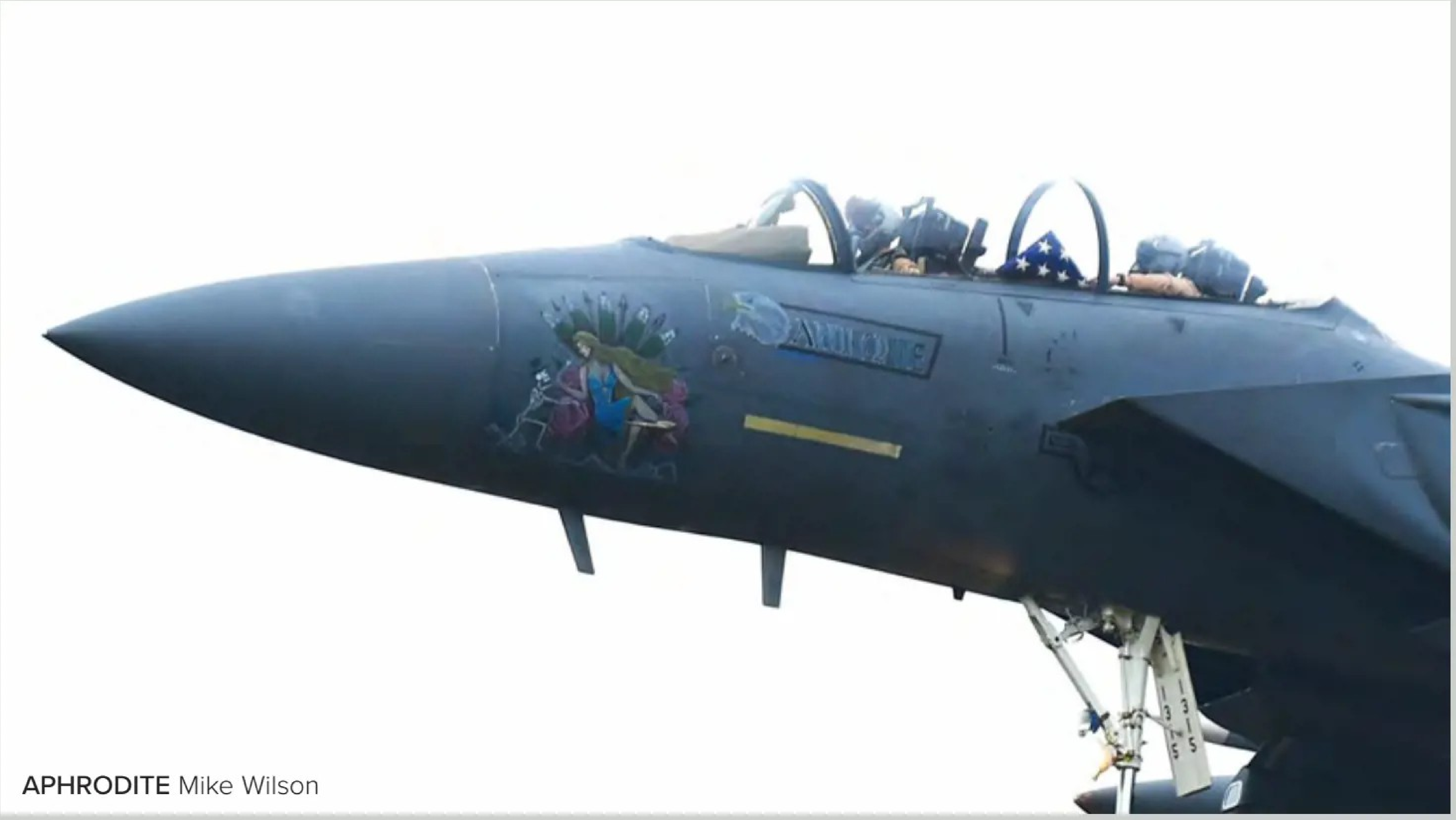
POSEIDON. Mike Wilson



ARES



HADES



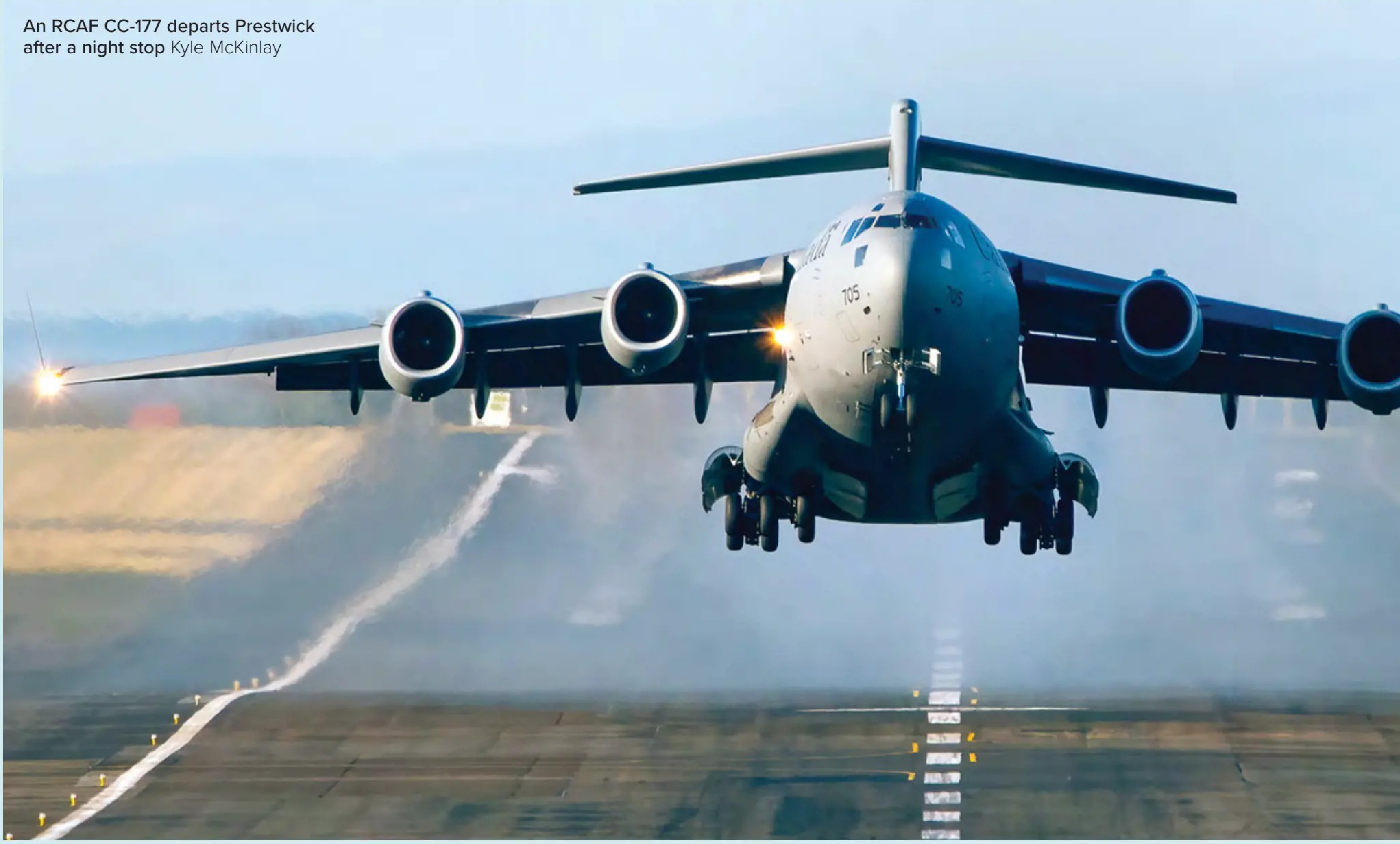
APHRODITE Mike Wilson

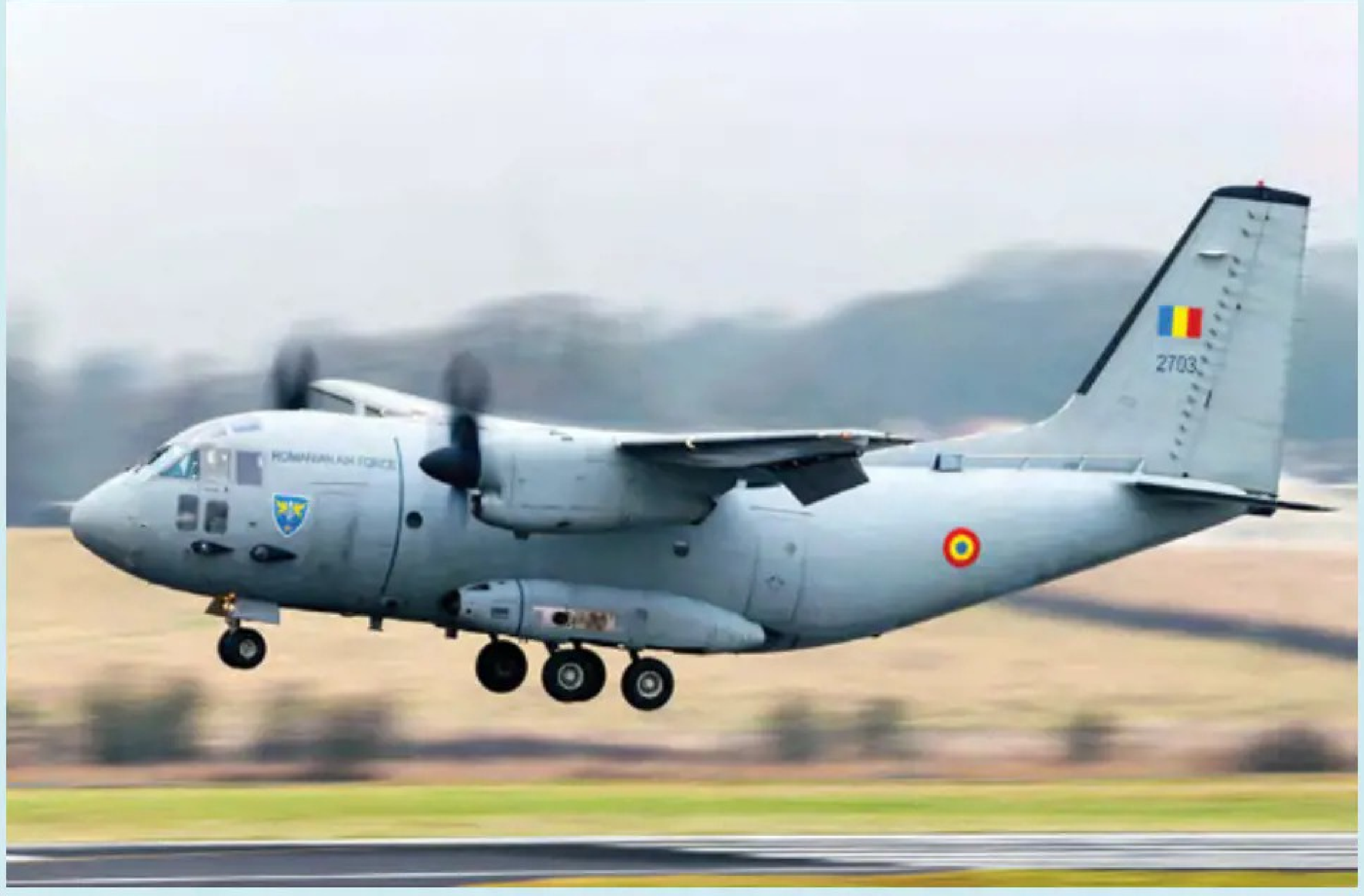
MILITARY MOVEMENTS

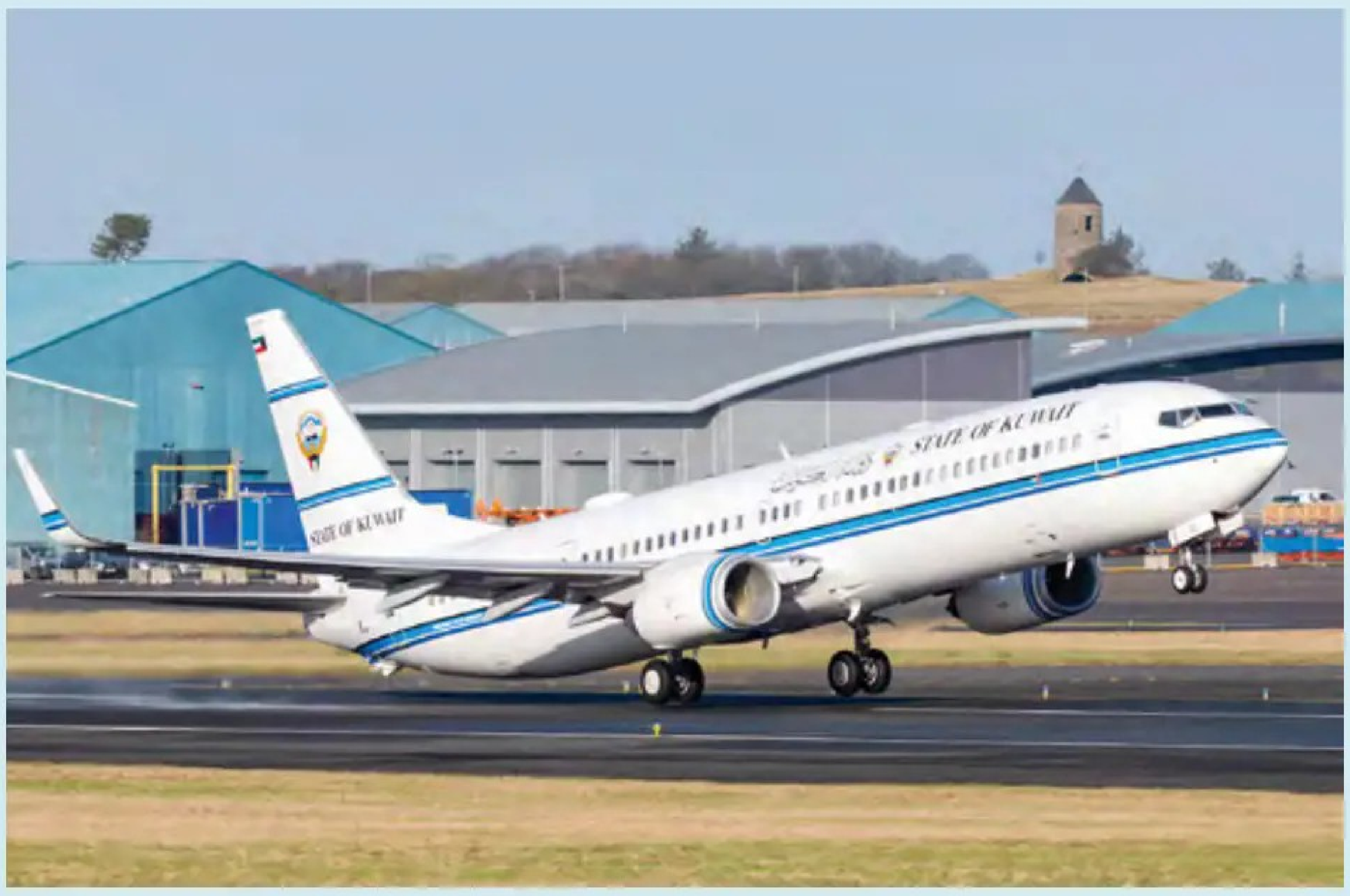
Ben Stanley Hall showcases the rich diversity of aircraft movements up and down the UK

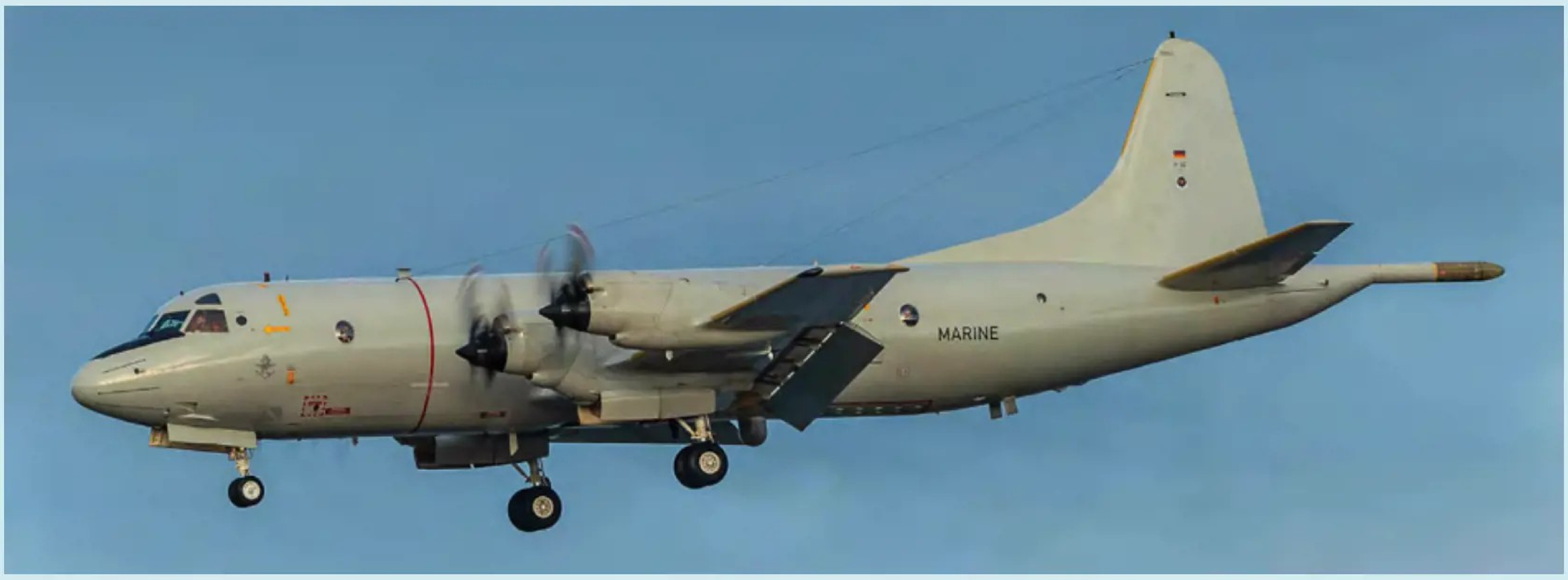
This month's selection of interesting aircraft movements is evenly split between England and Scotland, with aircraft ranging from the mighty Boeing 747 down to a Super Puma helicopter. The US, Canada and three European nations – France, Romania, Germany – are represented, along with gulf states Bahrain and Kuwait.

We welcome contributions from readers across the world. If you photograph an aircraft that is not in its usual location or could be of interest within the UK please email your images, without watermarks, to ben.hall@keypublishing.com using the subject heading *Just Passing Through*, with a short caption including as much information as possible. AN


An RCAF CC-177 departs Prestwick after a night stop Kyle McKinlay

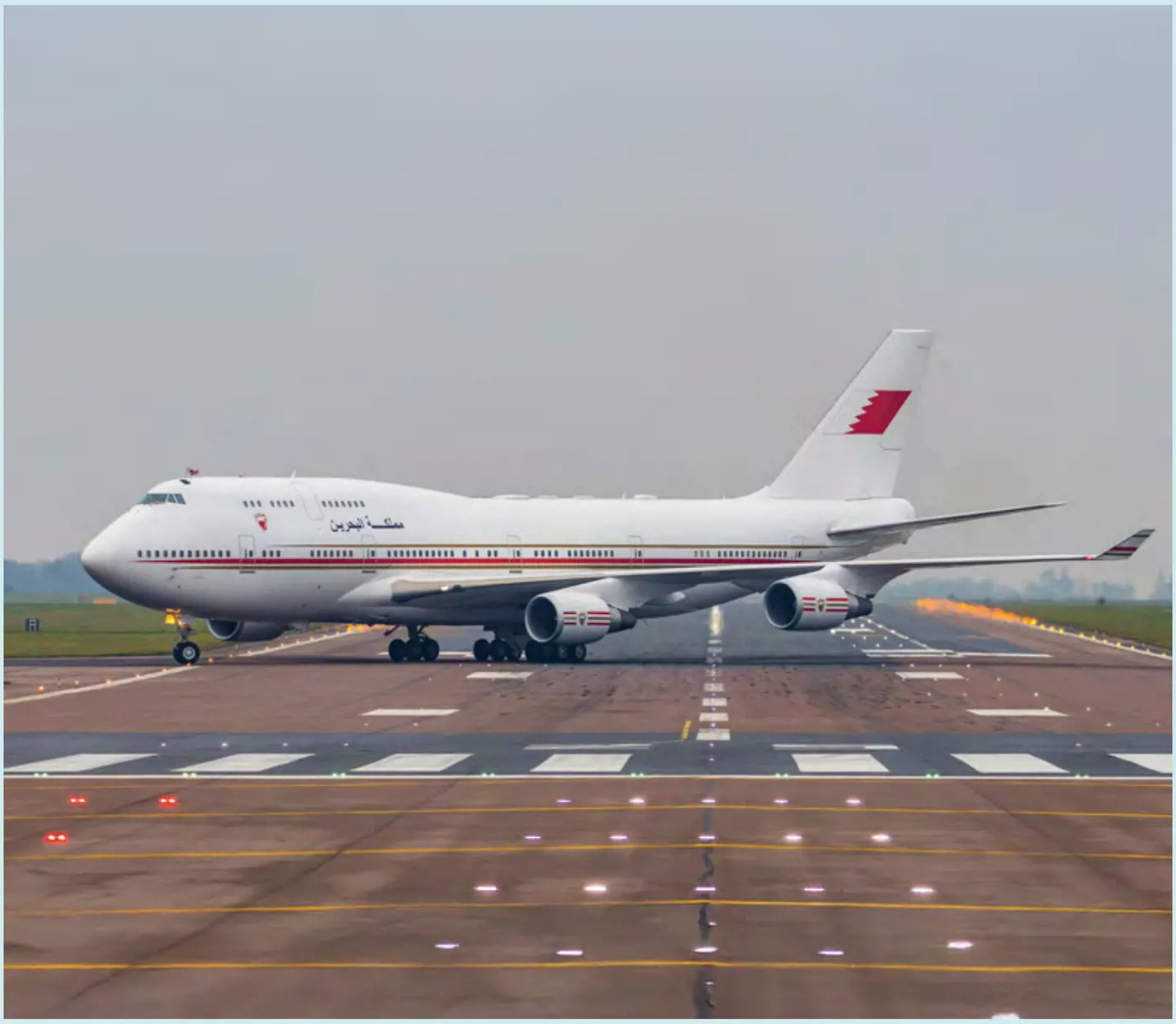

▲ Romanian Air Force C-27J Spartan, 2703, departed Glasgow after a fuel stop, heading to Iceland en route to the US Kyle McKinlay

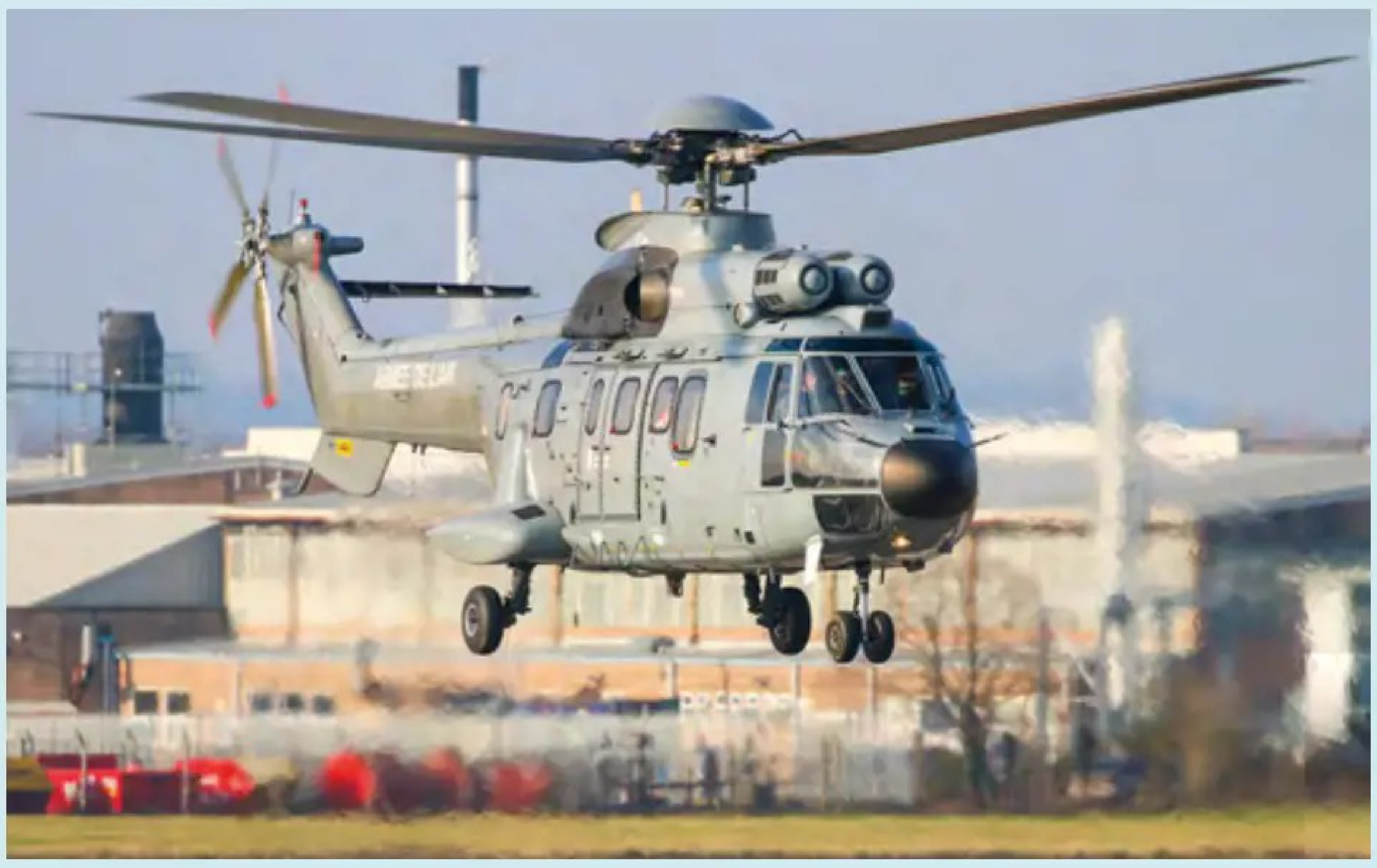

▲ tate of Kuwait Boeing 737 BBJ, 9K-GCC, departing Prestwick's runway 12 on January 16 after visiting for two days Kyle McKinlay



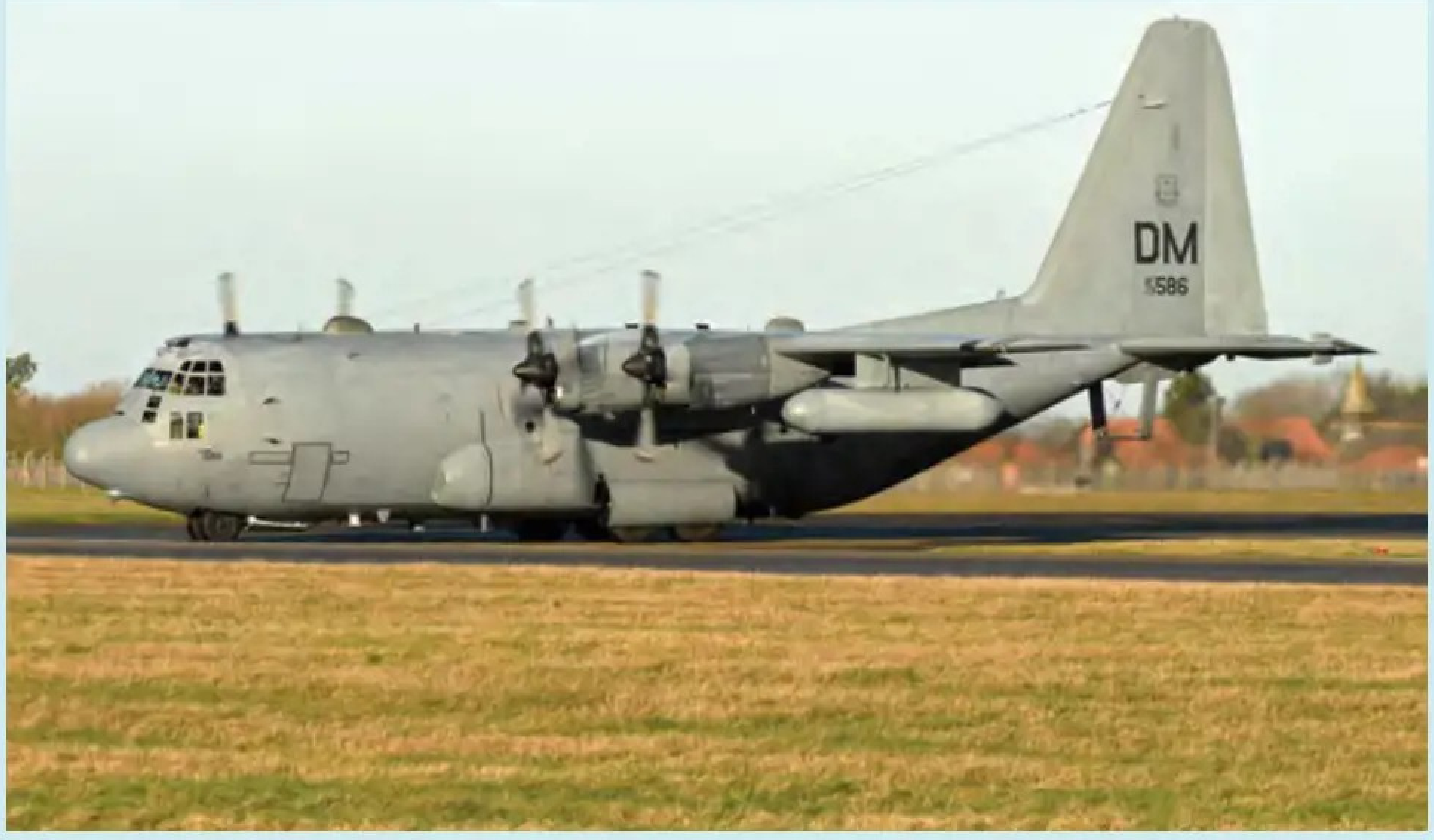
◀ **German Navy P-3C Orion arriving at RAF Lossiemouth on January 20, using callsign 'GNY4750'. It was attending the Jedi Maritime Patrol meeting** Simon Hall

▼ **Turning off the runway at RAF Brize Norton on January 24 is Bahrain Royal Flight's Boeing 747-4P8, A9C-HMK** ZM Aviation





▲ **French Air Force AS332L1 Super Puma, 2235/F-RAFZ, callsign 'COTAM1360', arriving at Gloucester Staverton on a gas-and-go before heading to north to Edinburgh** Rory Hill



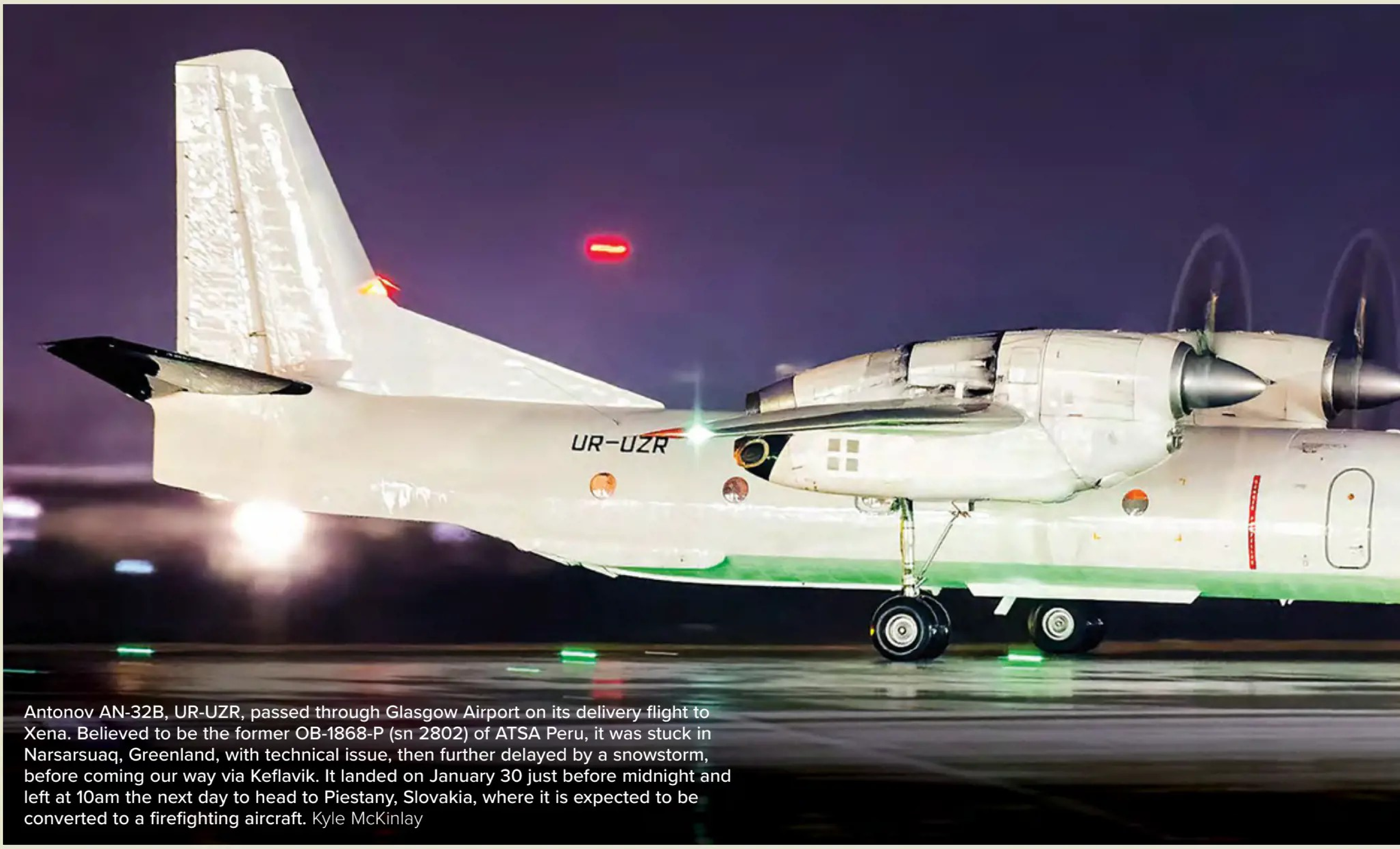
▲ **EC-130H Compass Call 73-1586/DM finally departed RAF Mildenhall to continue its return journey to its home base at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Arizona on January 25. The aircraft has been suffering maintenance issues since December** Luca Chadwick

CIVILIAN MOVEMENTS

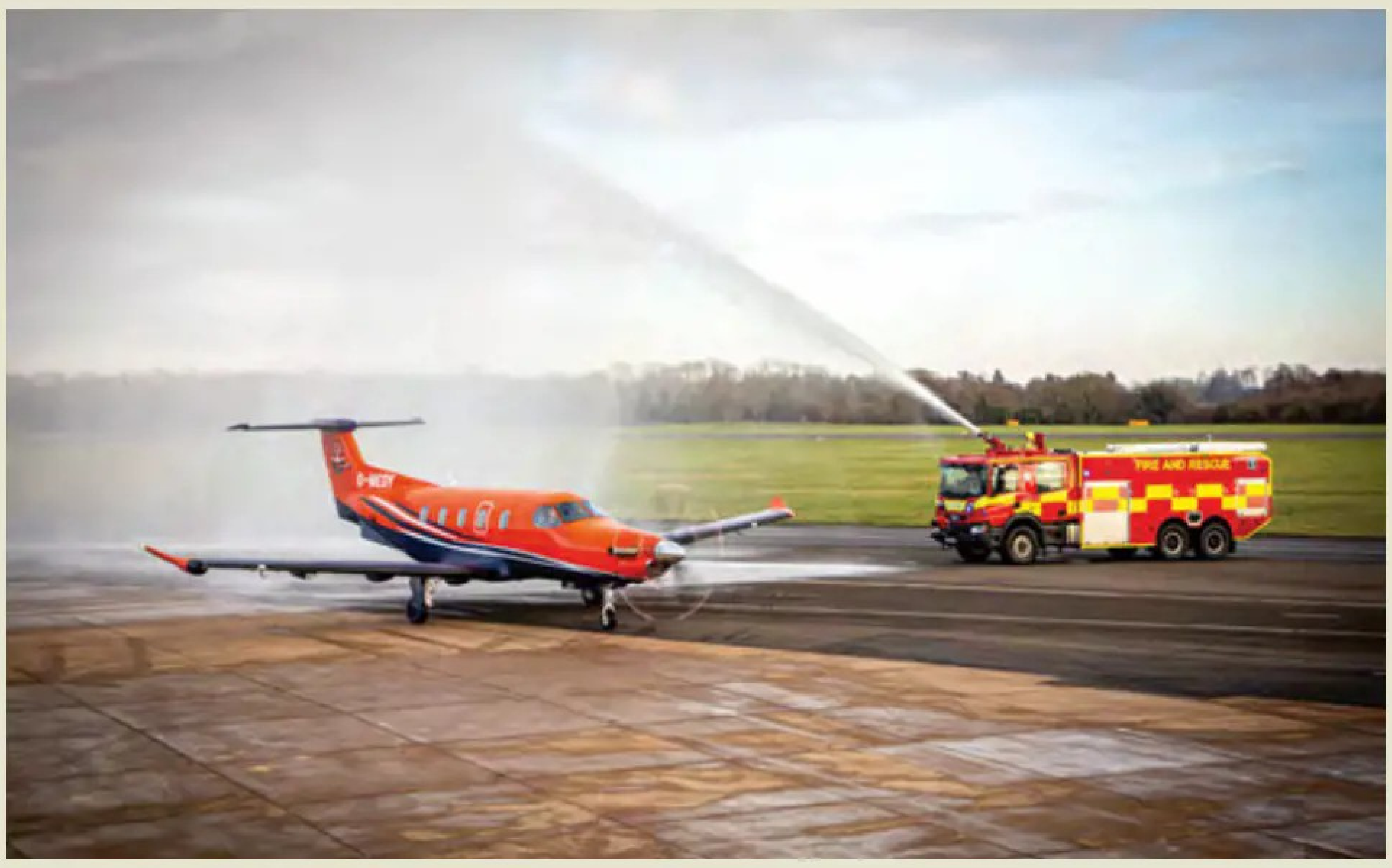
We showcase the rich diversity of aircraft movements up and down the UK

January saw some interesting visitors and deliveries to a variety of UK airports. We saw a rare 747-200 – one of only 16 left flying – and a new UK-based air ambulance arrived at Biggin Hill in the form of a PC-12NGX operated by SkyCare. Other movements saw a freshly painted 737 departing London Southend destined for Poland and a football charter.

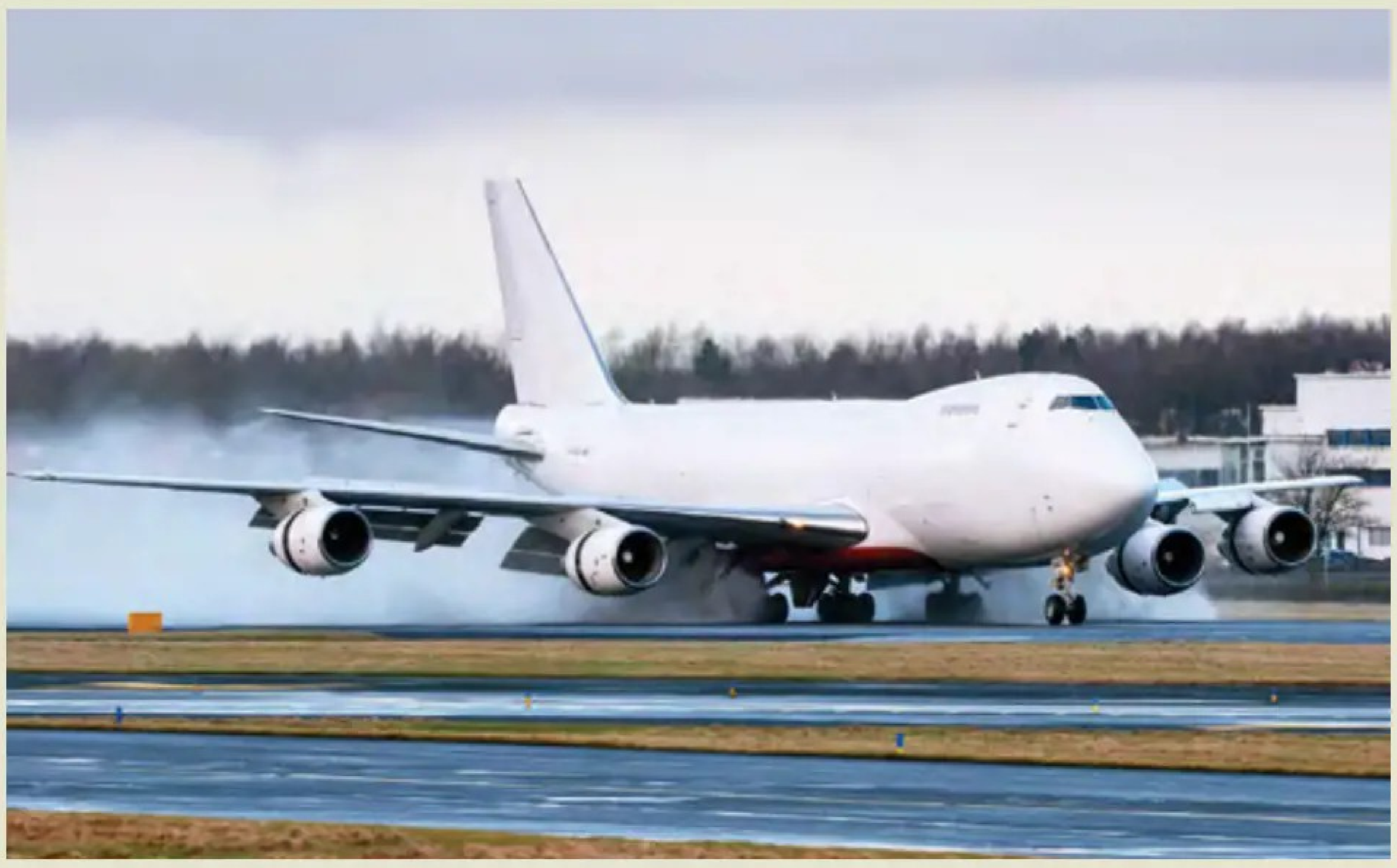
We welcome contributions from readers across the world. If you photograph an aircraft that is not in its usual location or could be of interest within the UK please email your images, without watermarks, to ben.hall@keypublishing.com or aviation-news@keypublishing.com using the subject heading *Just Passing Through*, with a short caption including as much information as possible. AN



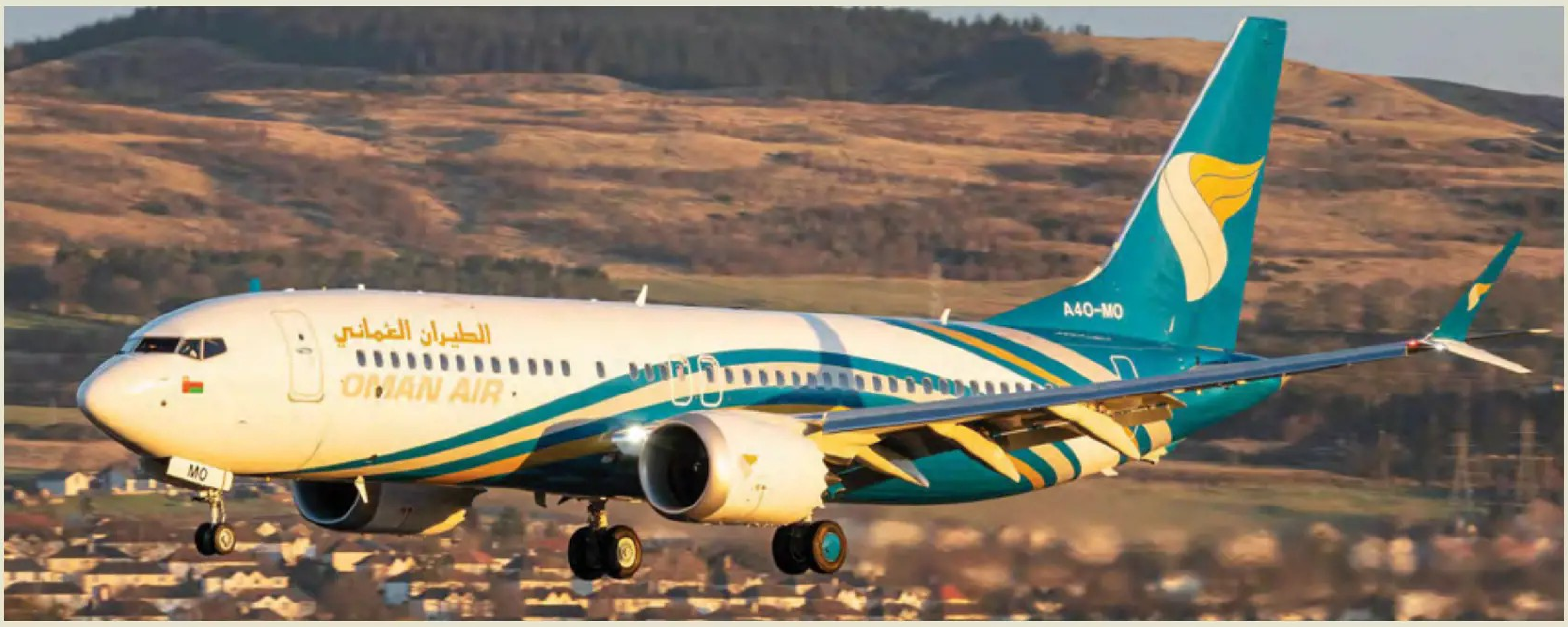
Antonov AN-32B, UR-UZR, passed through Glasgow Airport on its delivery flight to Xena. Believed to be the former OB-1868-P (sn 2802) of ATSA Peru, it was stuck in Narsarsuaq, Greenland, with technical issue, then further delayed by a snowstorm, before coming our way via Keflavik. It landed on January 30 just before midnight and left at 10am the next day to head to Piestany, Slovakia, where it is expected to be converted to a firefighting aircraft. Kyle McKinlay



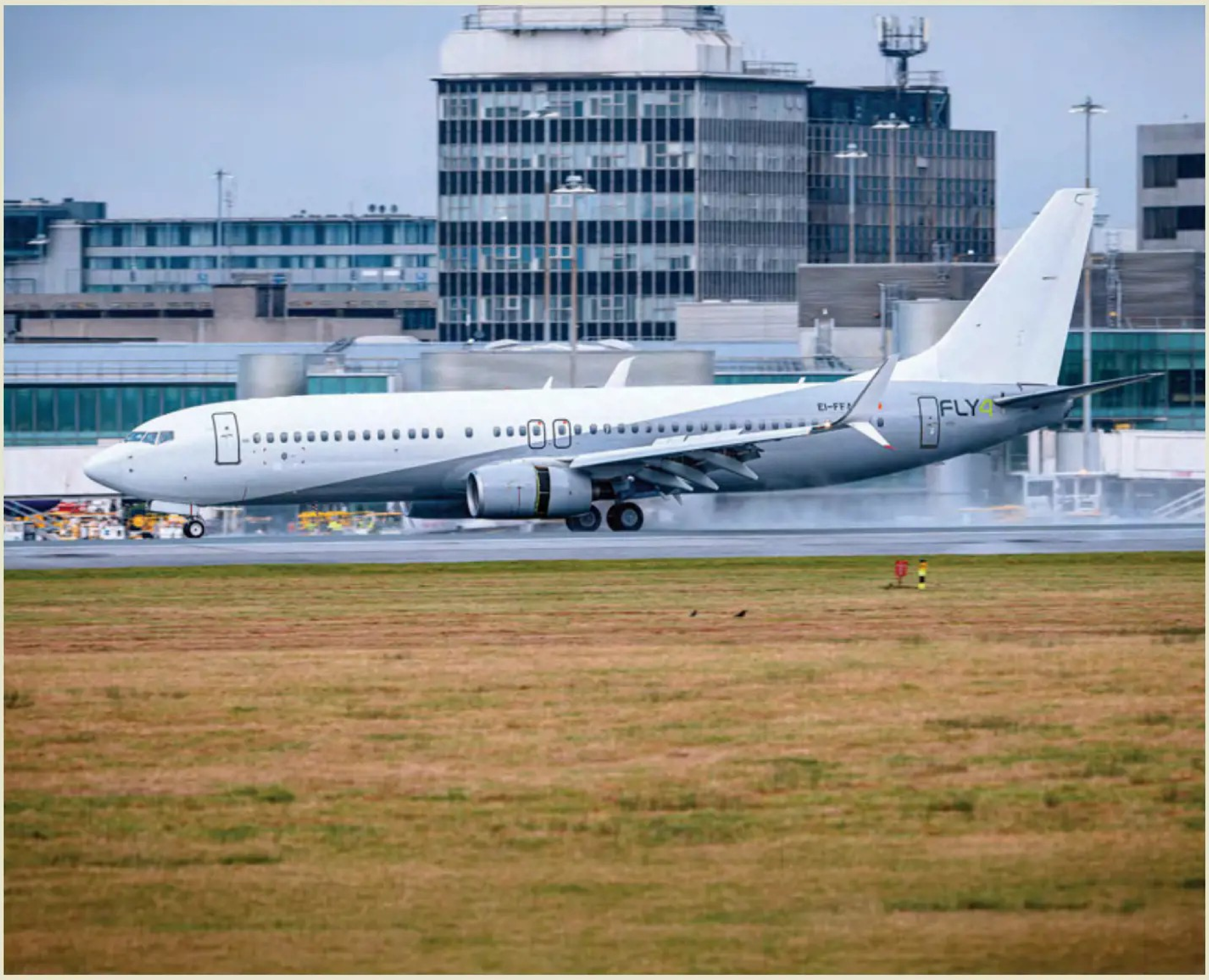
▲ G-MEDY, a PC-12NGX operated by SkyCare UK, arrived at Biggin Hill Airport on January 16. The aircraft is the airport's first dedicated air ambulance and is set to provide critical care transport for health services in Europe. SkyCareUK



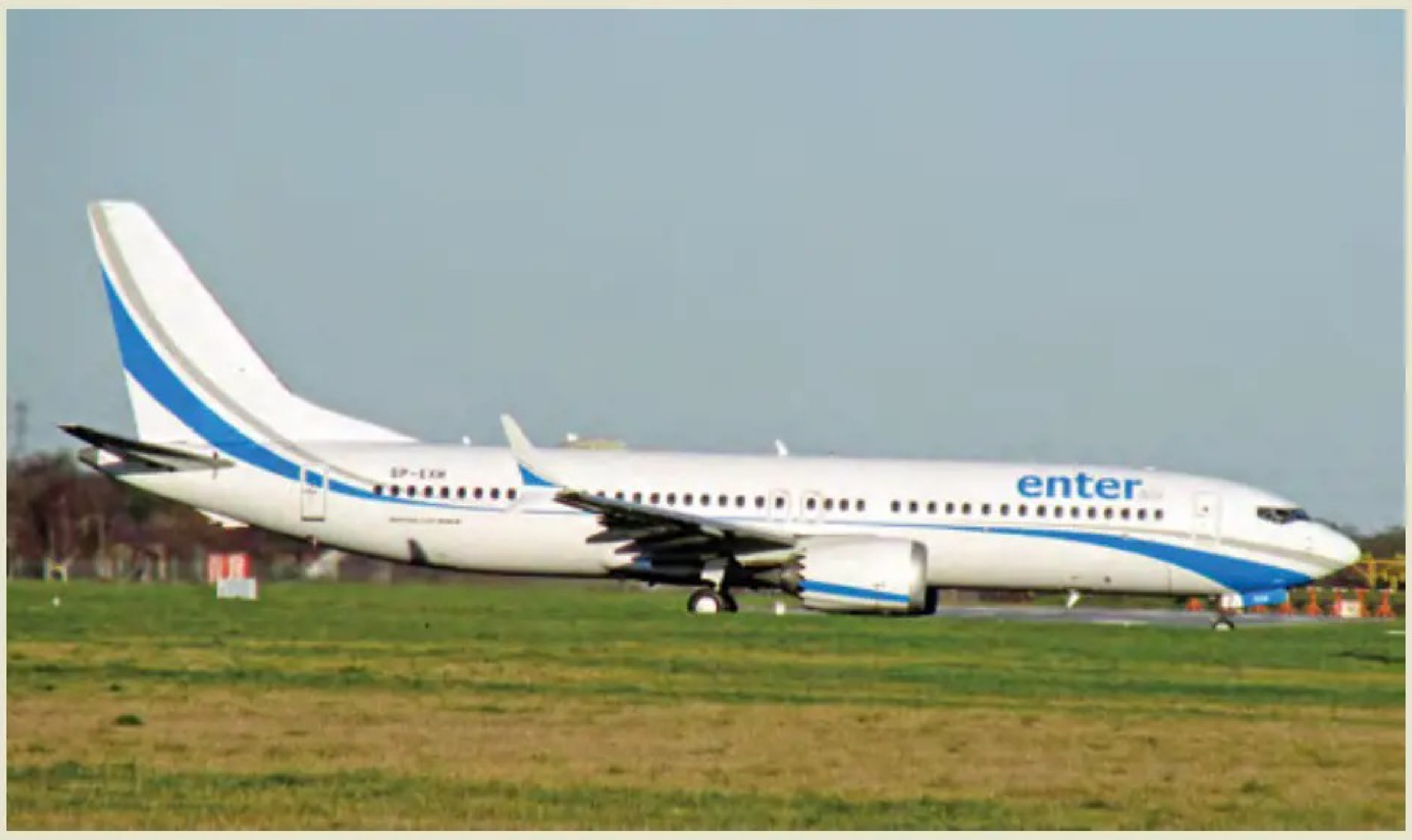
▲ 747-281F, ER-BAQ, landed at Prestwick from Liege, Belgium, on January 27 and departed for Larnaca, Cyprus, on January 29. The aircraft is operated by Flypro, a Moldovan cargo charter airline. Kyle McKinlay



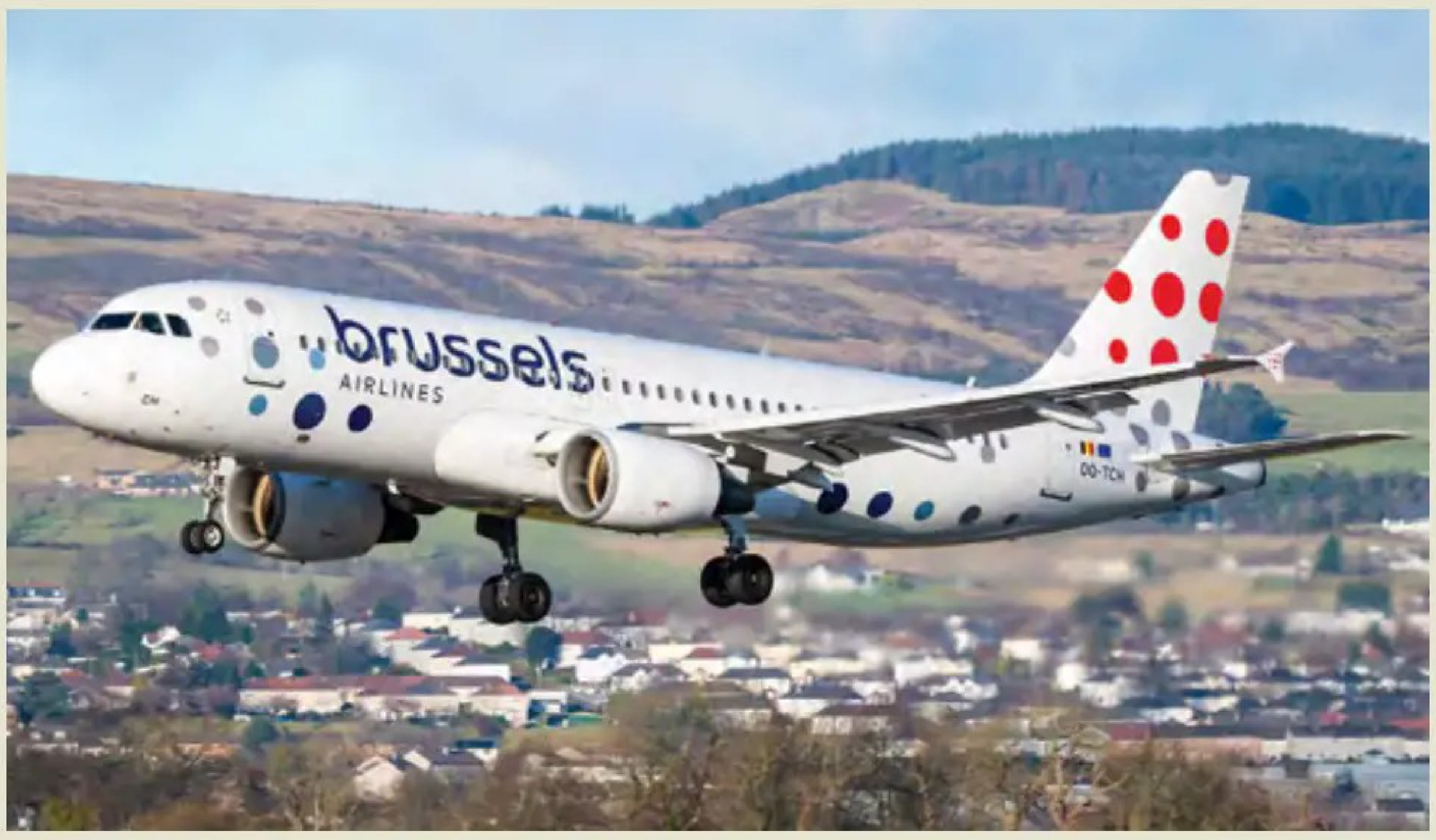
◀ Oman Air continues to receive their 737-8s with another delivery from the factory passing through Glasgow. Kyle Mckinlay



▲ Fly4 Airlines EI-FFA seen engaging the reverse thrust at Manchester Airport on January 31. The aircraft was believed to have been carrying a K pop band from London. Lee Spencer



▲ Enter Airways of Poland are in the process of repainting their fleet of Boeing 737s from a red scheme to a new blue colour which is more eyecatching. This image shows SP-EXH departing Southend for Warsaw on January 30. Simon Murdoch



▲ Brussels Airlines OO-TCH transported Royale Union Saint-Gilloise into Glasgow Airport to play Rangers in the Europa League on January 30. They lost 2-1 to the home team, then left the following day in A320 OO-SNB, which wears livery celebrating Belgian comic book hero Tintin. Kyle Mckinlay

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Scrambles in the spotlight

DH60 Gipsy Moth is the cover star of the March 2025 issue of Pilot magazine. Alexander Norman reports from the cockpit on the de Havilland design that launched private flying in Britain and around the world 100 years ago.

Meanwhile, a private pilot gets to fly the legendary F-16 with the Royal Danish Air Force, and besides the inevitable airsickness, the adventure turns out to be nothing short of a dream. Plus, there's a first look at Pelegrin Tarragon where we fly the sleek Lithuanian-made two-seater, which proves to be simultaneously a great cruiser and a nimble aircraft for fun flying.

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REGISTER REVIEW

The latest changes on the UK, Irish, Isle of Man and Guernsey registers

RESTORATIONS

REG'N	MODE(S)	TYPE	C/N	OWNER
G-BDAH	408235	Evans VP-1 (built by RW Lowe)	PFA 7007	MW Roberts (c/o AOPA, Kemsing, Kent)
G-CDPN	404EA6	UltraMagic S-105	105/135	MA Stelling, (South Queensferry, W. Lothian)
G-MWHS	408226	AMF Chevvron 2-32C	021	J Pool (Darlington, Co. Durham)
G-RADI	403FA5	Piper PA-28-181 Archer II	28-8690002	JP Norton, Trustee of DI Archer Group, Tollerton, Nottinghamshire
G-WEWI	40313D	Cessna 172	56555	TJ Wassell, Sleap, Shropshire
G-ZLLE	404534	Aerospatiale SA341G Gazelle	1012	S Atherton, Crabtree Farm, Deighton, N. Yorkshire)

NEW REGISTRATIONS

REG'N	MODE(S)	TYPE	C/N	OWNER
G-CMVT	40818F	Aeropro EuroFOX 3K (assembled by Ascent Industries Ltd)	71324	MR Buchanan, (Dadson Farm, Bethersden, Kent)
G-CMWO	4081A7	Aeropro EuroFOX 3K (assembled by Ascent Industries Ltd)	67123-1	SB Williams, Headcorn, Kent
G-CMWY	40822C	Spacek SD-1 Minisport	209	TC Barnby, (Kirkwall, Orkney)
G-CMWZ	408236	Flylight Adam	DA270	DJ Seymour, (Hereford, Herefordshire)
G-CMXG	4081EE	Cameron Z-120	12737	RP Nash, (Beighton, Norfolk)
G-CMYM	4081DC	Aeropro EuroFOX 2K (assembled by Ascent Industries Ltd)	71124	IM Norfield, Trustee of Hangar 42, (Lightwater, Surrey)
G-CMYO	408221	Van's RV-12iS	LAA 363A-15772	MA Streatfield, (Stowmarket, Suffolk)
G-ECHL	408230	Cirrus SR20	9819	A9 Leasing LLP, Coventry, West Midlands
G-GJOA	408168	Aeropro EuroFOX 3K (assembled by Ascent Industries Ltd)	71024	GB Porter, City of Derry, Co. Londonderry
G-GLVZ	4081E5	Magni M24C Plus (assembled by Magni Gyro Ltd)	24-21-5476	ACSM Hart, Farley Farm, Farley Chamberlain, Hampshire
G-HAGI	4081C4	Boeing 737-8	42828	Ascent Airways Ltd, London Gatwick, West Sussex (NB)
G-HLYI	4081AA	Airbus A321-251NX	12161	Jet2.com Ltd, Leeds Bradford, West Yorkshire (NB)
G-KLCK	40820A	Airbus AS350B3 Ecureuil	9658	TSL Contractors Ltd trading as Skyhook Helicopters, Fife Airport, Glenrothes, Fife
G-LYNJ	40821B	Bell 407	56428	Jones Brothers (Henllan) Ltd, Glangwill Farm, Bronwydd Arms, Carmarthenshire
G-LYZY	40821D	Westland Lysander IIIA	Y1530	Patina Ltd, Duxford
G-MRRL	4081ED	Agusta AW109SP Grand New	22300	VLL Ltd trading as GB Helicopters. Oakfield Manor, Lower Peover, Cheshire
G-RESH	408162	Leonardo AW139	32071	Bristow Helicopters Ltd, Aberdeen International, Aberdeenshire (NB)
G-RLXB	4081F0	Elixir Aircraft Elixir	MSN032	Rubric Aviation Ltd, Fife Airport, Glenrothes, Fife
G-SUNM	4080DE	Airbus A321-251NX	12127	Jet2.com Ltd, Leeds Bradford, West Yorkshire (NB)
G-TUOB	407FAC	Boeing 737-8	44636	TUI Airways Ltd trading as TUI, London Luton, Bedfordshire (NB)
G-UZED	40815B	Airbus A320-251N	12193	Easyjet Airline Company Ltd, London Luton, Bedfordshire (NB)
G-UZEE	40815C	Airbus A320-251N	12357	Easyjet Airline Company Ltd, London Luton, Bedfordshire (NB)
G-VFUN	407FB7	Flylight Adam	DA210	M Turner, (Hawley Bottom, Devon)
G-VPIE	408121	Airbus A330-941	2077	Virgin Atlantic Airways Ltd, London Heathrow, Middlesex (NB)
EI-AEZ	TBA	Morane-Saulnier MS.885 Super Rallye	51	Private Individual, (Co. Laois)
EI-HHT	4CAD5C	Airbus A220-300	55317	ALC Clover Ireland Ltd, (operated by ITA Airways, Rome Ciampino, Italy (NB))
EI-HNS	TBA	Airbus A320-214	6350	Macquarie Aerospace (Ireland) Ltd, (stored at Prague-Ruzyne, Czechia)
I-HNY	TBA	Airbus A320-271N	8492	APF 4 Project No.8 Ltd, (stored Kuala Lumpur-Sempang, Malaysia)

EI-HNZ	4CAEF2	Boeing 737-8Z9	33833	Macquarie Airfinance Acquisitions (Ireland) Ltd, (stored at Cotswold, Gloucestershire)
EI-HRE	TBA	Boeing 737-86J(BDSF)	30499	ASL Airlines (Ireland) Ltd, Dublin, Co. Fingal (NB)
EI-HSA	4CAEE0	Bombardier CRJ-900LR	15080	CityJet DAC (operated for SAS Scandinavian Airlines, Copenhagen-Kastrup, Denmark (NB))
EI-IRO	4CA2F8	Leonardo AW189	89026	Bristow Ireland Ltd, Shannon, Co. Clare (for operation on behalf of Irish Coastguard (NB))
EI-MVA	4CAEFA	Airbus A220-100	50074	Aurora Financing DAC, (operated by ITA Airways, Rome-Fiumicino, Italy)
EI-MVB	4CAEFB	Airbus A220-100	50075	Aurora Financing DAC, (operated by ITA Airways, Rome-Fiumicino, Italy)
EI-MVC	4CAEFC	Airbus A220-100	50076	Aurora Financing 3 DAC, (operated by ITA Airways, Rome-Fiumicino, Italy)
EI-MVF	4CAEFF	Airbus A220-100	50082	Aurora Financing 3 DAC, (operated by ITA Airways, Rome-Fiumicino, Italy)
EI-RLY	TBA	Flight Design CTSW (assembled by Aerodesign)	07-04-19-AR	Private Individual, (Co. Laois)
EI-XLR	4CAE29	Airbus A321-253NY(XLR)	11348	Aer Lingus Ltd, Dublin, Co. Fingal
EI-XLT	4CAE30	Airbus A321-253NY(XLR)	11590	Aer Lingus Ltd, Dublin, Co. Fingal
EI-XTW	TBA	Eurocopter AS350B3 Ecureuil	3743	Aero Heli Ltd, Newtownards, Co. Down
M-ABTC	424C82	Embraer EMB-135ER	145376	Lorizon Invest SAS, (Vilnius, Lithuania)
M-ABTG	424C85	Airbus A320-216	2885	K2 Aircraft Finance Ltd, (stored Cotswold, Gloucestershire)
M-ABTH	424C89	Airbus AS350B3 Ecureuil	9523	Airman Helicopters Inc, (Lauderdale-By-Sea, Florida, USA)
M-ATCH	4247BD	Dassault Falcon 2000EX	088	Dassault Leasing Ltd, Pardubice, Czechia
M-SIMO	424C86	ATR-72-212A	900	ACIA Aero Leasing APAC Ltd, Antananarivo, Madagascar
M-YFFC	424C88	Leonardo AW109SP Grand New	22448	Air Partners Aviation Management Ltd, acting in its capacity as General Partner of Aviation Partners LP, Ankara, Turkiye
M-YNNS	424C7A	Gulfstream G700	87034	Aviation One Ltd, London Luton, Bedfordshire
2-ATUP	TBA	Boeing 737-44P(SF)	29914	Aero Plus International Holdings Ltd, (stored Kuala Lumpur Malaysia)
2-BOBG	TBA	Airbus A330-243	919	Hangrun Tech Pte Ltd, (stored at Chengdu-Shuangliu, Peoples Republic of China)
2-GEQI	TBA	Eurocopter EC225LP Super Puma II	2746	GD Helicopter Finance Ltd, (Dublin, Co. Fingal)
2-GEQL	TBA	Eurocopter EC225LP Super Puma II	2783	GD Helicopter Finance Ltd, (Dublin, Co. Fingal)
2-GEVT	TBA	Eurocopter EC225LP Super Puma II	2668	GD Helicopter Finance Ltd, (Dublin, Co. Fingal)
2-GEZL	TBA	Eurocopter EC225LP Super Puma II	2915	GD Helicopter Finance Ltd, (Dublin, Co. Fingal)
2-GEZP	TBA	Eurocopter EC225LP Super Puma II	2959	GD Helicopter Finance Ltd, (Dublin, Co. Fingal)
2-SATC	TBA	ATR-72-212A	1164	Red-Tail Aviation Ltd, (stored Cranfield, Bedfordshire)
2-STLD	TBA	Airbus A340-541	725	Hua An Aviation Parts Co. Ltd, (stored Taiyuan Wusu, Peoples Republic of China)

PREVIOUS IDENTITIES

Reg'n	Previous Identity
G-ECHL	ex N221MV
G-HAGI	ex 9H-ERI
G-HLYI	ex D-AVYB
G-KLCK	ex LN-OMG
G-LYNJ	ex C-GSQQ
G-LYZY	ex OO-SOT
G-MRRL	ex I-RRSS
G-RESH	ex I-RAIP
G-SUNM	ex D-AZWQ
G-TUOB	ex N4022T
G-UZED	ex D-AWBW
G-UZEE	ex F-WWIN
G-VFUN	ex G-THRN
G-VPIE	ex F-WWCL
G-ZLLE	ex (YU-...)
EI-AEZ	ex D-EIKB
EI-HHT	to C-FOWY
EI-HNS	ex 9K-AKE
EI-HNY	ex VT-IZA
EI-HRE	ex OK-TVX
EI-HSA	ex N471BS
EI-IRO	ex I-RAIC
EI-MVA	ex I-ADVA
EI-MVB	ex I-ADVB
EI-MVC	ex I-ADVC
EI-MVF	ex C-FOVD
EI-RLY	ex EC-FA4
EI-XLR	ex D-AZXY
EI-XLT	ex D-AYAH
EI-XTW	ex OE-XTW
M-ABTC	ex (F-....), G-SAJT
M-ABTG	ex PK-AXS
M-ABTH	ex G-HITD
M-ATCH	ex G-LATE
M-SIMO	ex 9M-MWH
M-YFFC	ex G-OFFC
M-YNNS	ex N734GD
2-ATUP	ex B-2501
2-BOBG	ex B-6089
2-GEQI	ex D2-EQI
2-GEQL	ex D2-EQL
2-GEVT	ex D2-EVT
2-GEZL	ex D2-EZL
2-GEZP	ex D2-EZP
2-SATC	ex ES-ATC
2-STLD	ex HS-TLD

CANCELLATIONS

Reg'n	Type	C/N	Reason
G-AKDW	de Havilland DH89A Dragon Rapide	6897	Cancelled as Permanently WFU (Displayed at de Havilland Aircraft Museum, Salisbury Hall, Hertfordshire)
G-BSAZ	Denney Kitfox Mk.2	PFA 172-11664	Cancelled by CAA (Permit to Fly expired 26.06.97. last reported stored Huthwaite, Nottinghamshire 08.19)
G-BZPK	Cameron C-80	4183	Cancelled by CAA (CofA expired 06.12.07)
G-CBDS	Scottish Aviation Bulldog T.1	BH120/356	Cancelled by CAA (CofA expired 27.05.11. last reported at Caernarfon, Gwynedd 07.23)
G-CEYM	Van's RV-6	PFA 181A-14595	Cancelled as Destroyed (Permit to Fly expired 23.06.23, details unknown)
G-CFHG	Schempp-Hirth Mini Nimbus C	140	Cancelled as Destroyed (crashed at Crouch Lane, Barlanington, West Sussex 05.06.24)
G-CHBF	Schempp-Hirth Nimbus 2C	191	Cancelled as Destroyed (crashed during a field landing in Welsh Mountains 21.06.24)
G-CHFB	Schleicher Ka-6CR Rhönsegler	6344SI	Cancelled as Destroyed (CofA expired 18.03.20, details unknown)
G-CJSR	Steen Skybolt	SB-1990	Cancelled by CAA (No Permit to Fly issued, rebuild abandoned)
G-CKYD	AutoGyro MTOSport 2017	RSUK.MTOS/006	Cancelled as Destroyed (damaged in a taxiing accident at Inverness, Invernesshire 05.11.23)
G-CMUR	Airbus AS350B3 Ecureuil	9620	To Kenya
G-CMWJ	Eurocopter AS350B Ecureuil	2232	To USA as N212CM
G-CUGC	Schleicher ASW-19B	19115	Cancelled by CAA (CofA expired 15.04.24)
G-DFKI	Westland Helicopters SA341C Gazelle HT.Mk.2	1216	To South Africa
G-JBAS	Neico Lancair 200	PFA 191-11465	Cancelled by CAA (Permit to Fly expired 11.05.11)
G-JIBO	BAe Jetstream 3102	711	Cancelled by CAA (CofA expired 29.04.16, stored at St Athan, The Vale of Glamorgan 11.24)
G-JMCV	Boeing 737-4K5(SF)	24128	To USA (CofA expired 13.01.25, flown to Opa Locka, Florida 21.10.24 & stored)
G-LATE	Dassault Falcon 2000EX	088	To Isle of Man as M-ATCH
G-LNDN	MD Helicopter MD902 Explorer	900-00125	To Austria as OE-XLN
G-MGAG	Aviasud Mistral	BMAA/HB/009	Cancelled as Permanently WFU (Permit to Fly expired 27.06.00)
G-MIAP	Bombardier Global 7500	70148	To Malta as 9H-MAX
G-MTAL	Solar Wings Pegasus Photon	SW-WP-0023	Cancelled by CAA (SSDR microlight so no Permit to Fly required)
G-MWCC	Solar Wings Pegasus XL-R	SW-WA-1447	Cancelled by CAA (Permit to Fly expired 26.03.05)
G-MWEL	Mainair Gemini Flash IIA	780-0290-7-W573	Cancelled by CAA (Permit to Fly expired 04.08.12)
G-MYPZ	BFC Challenger II	PFA 177A-12689	Cancelled as Permanently WFU (Permit to Fly expired 29.03.17)
G-OFFC	Leonardo AW109SP Grand New	22448	To Isle of Man as M-YFFC
G-OJCL	Robinson R22 Beta	1950	Cancelled as Permanently WFU (CofA expired 19.05.17, last reported at Gloucestershire 05.20)
G-OLEE	Reims Cessna F152	1797	Cancelled by CAA (Extensively damaged when bounced on landing at Fairoaks 22.01.19)
G-OXFG	Piper PA-34-220T Seneca V	3449486	To USA as N110GG
G-PFTD	Tecnam P2006-JC	1242	To Spain

G-RVLW	Reims Cessna F406 Caravan II	0052	Cancelled as Permanently WFU (CofA expired 29.10.22, last reported stored at East Midlands, Leicestershire 2020)
G-TAWK	Boeing 737-8K5	37239	To Canada as C-FLWK
G-THRN	Flylight Adam	DA210	Re-registered as G-VFUN
G-ULFX	Gulfstream G600	73047	To USA as N347G
G-ZIGI	Robin DR400/180 Regent	2107	Cancelled as Destroyed (Extensively damaged in forced-landing in a wheat field near Niort, Deux-Sèvres, France 12.07.22)
EI-HKC	Airbus A380-841	084	Cancelled at Owner's Request (stored Tarbes-Lourdes, France)
EI-IMT	Airbus A319-111	5018	Cancelled at Owner's Request (stored Belgrade -Nikola Tesla, Serbia)
EI-JIA	Beech 200 King Air	BB-451	To Switzerland as HB-GJI
EI-JRD	Boeing 737-4Y0(SF)	24917	To Gambia as C5-JRD
M-ABPD	ATR-72-212A	1126	To USA as N1126V
M-ABSV	Learjet 60	60-280	To Swedish Air Force
M-ABSW	Learjet 60	60-296	To Swedish Air Force
M-ABTA	Learjet 60	60-252	To Swedish Air Force
M-ABTG	Airbus A320-216	2885	To Cayman Islands as VQ-CAD
M-DMBP	Learjet 40	45-2133	To USA as N750ST
M-SIMO	ATR-72-212A	900	To Madagascar
M-USIC	Gulfstream G550	5394	To USA as N534GA
2-AECE	Airbus A320-214	3014	Cancelled at Owner's Request (stored Greenwood Leflore, Mississippi, USA)
2-AIAT	Boeing 747-409F	33729	To Austria as OE-LRI
2-CDCB	Bombardier DHC-8-402Q	4592	Cancelled by Guernsey CAA (stored North Bay. Ontario, Canada)
2-CDCC	Bombardier DHC-8-402Q	4593	Cancelled by Guernsey CAA (stored North Bay. Ontario, Canada)
2-CDCD	Bombardier DHC-8-402Q	4594	Cancelled by Guernsey CAA (stored North Bay. Ontario, Canada)
2-CDCE	Bombardier DHC-8-402Q	4596	Cancelled by Guernsey CAA (stored North Bay. Ontario, Canada)
2-CDCF	Bombardier DHC-8-402Q	4599	Cancelled by Guernsey CAA (stored North Bay. Ontario, Canada)
2-GTQB	Boeing 737-8Q8(BCF)	30696	To Brazil as PS-GFG
2-HRQC	Boeing 737-8FE	33797	Cancelled at Owner's Request (stored Jakarta, Indonesia)
2-HRYU	Boeing 737-8FE	33797	Cancelled at Owner's Request (stored Pinal Airpark, Marana, Arizona, USA)
2-JWLN	Airbus A380-841	089	Cancelled at Owner's Request (stored Tarbes-Lourdes, France)
2-LIVE	Pilatus PC-12/47E	2383	To USA as N250KK
2-OTOD	Cessna 525B CitationJet CJ3	525B0696	To Austria as OE-GCN
2-TWJO	Airbus A320-271N	9332	To Turkey as TC-LBK
2-YAYN	Airbus A319-132	3803	Cancelled at Owner's Request (stored Castellon-Costa Azahar, Spain)
2-YAYP	Airbus A319-132	3832	Cancelled at Owner's Request (stored Castellon-Costa Azahar, Spain)

UPDATES & CORRECTIONS

Reg'n	Details
G-BGBV	Type officially changed to a Slingsby T65-17L 11.12.24
G-CKTV	Became I-BRPP 11.24
G-CMDJ	Became I-AVGA 11.24
G-CMJO	Builder officially changed to Hawker De Havilland Aircraft Ltd 10.12.24
G-CMSS	Type officially changed to a Kitfox Mk.7 Supersport 17.12.24
G-HITD	Became M-ABTH 11.12.24
G-MYMS	Type officially changed to a Rans S6-ESD (modified) 10.12.24
G-SALE	Became OE-SAE 24.10.24
G-THRE	Became F-HJTH 16.10.24
G-USHI	Type officially changed to a Piper PA-28-140 (modified) 10.12.24
EI-GVN	Construction number is 34684 (corrects Page 72, February 2025)
EI-IMJ	Became LY-FAB 10.06.24
2-OAOM	Became 5Y-SKF 20.12.24

Key: NB – Nominal Base. A place name in brackets relates to the owner's address, as where the aircraft is based is unknown.

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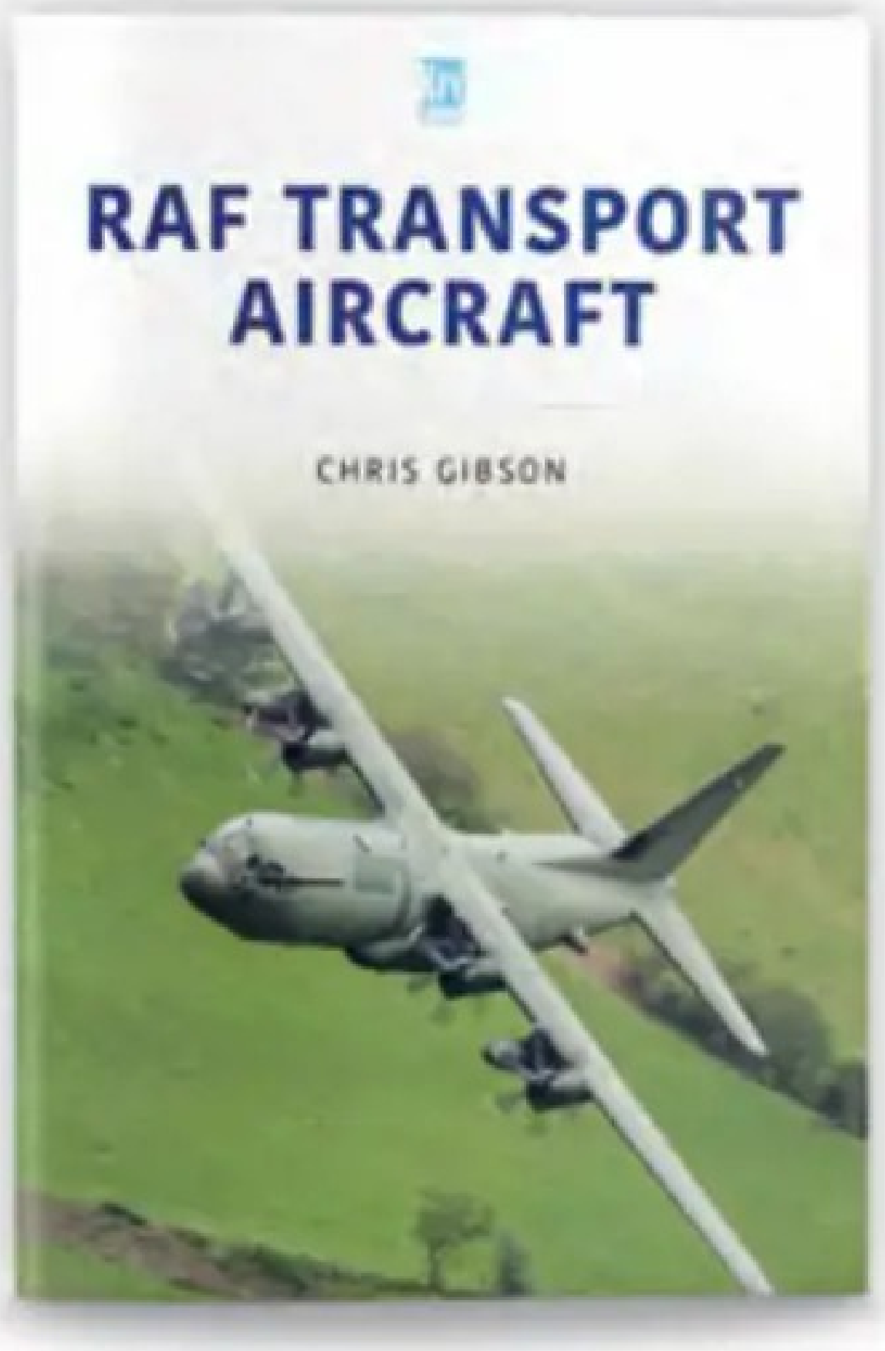

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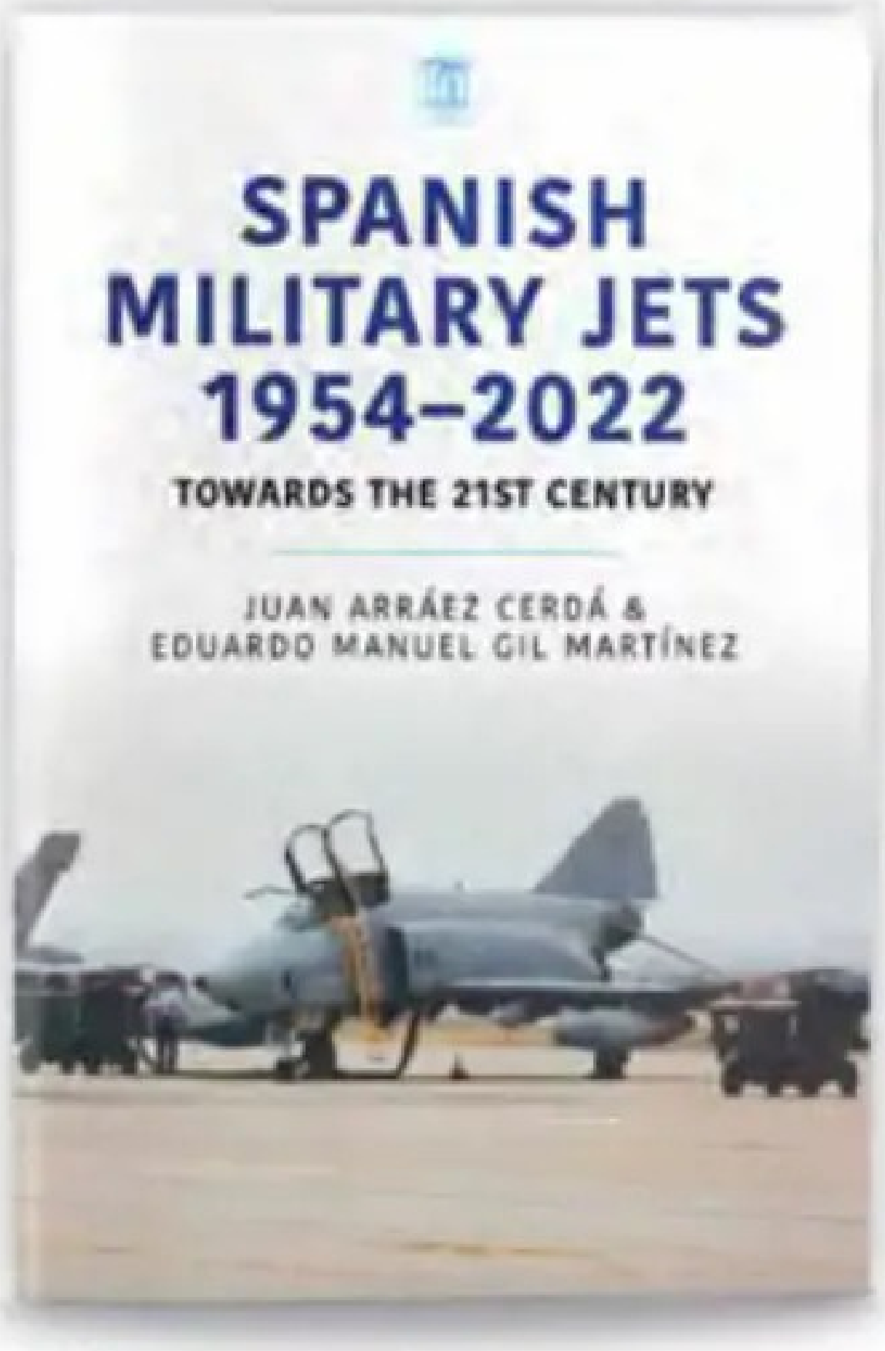

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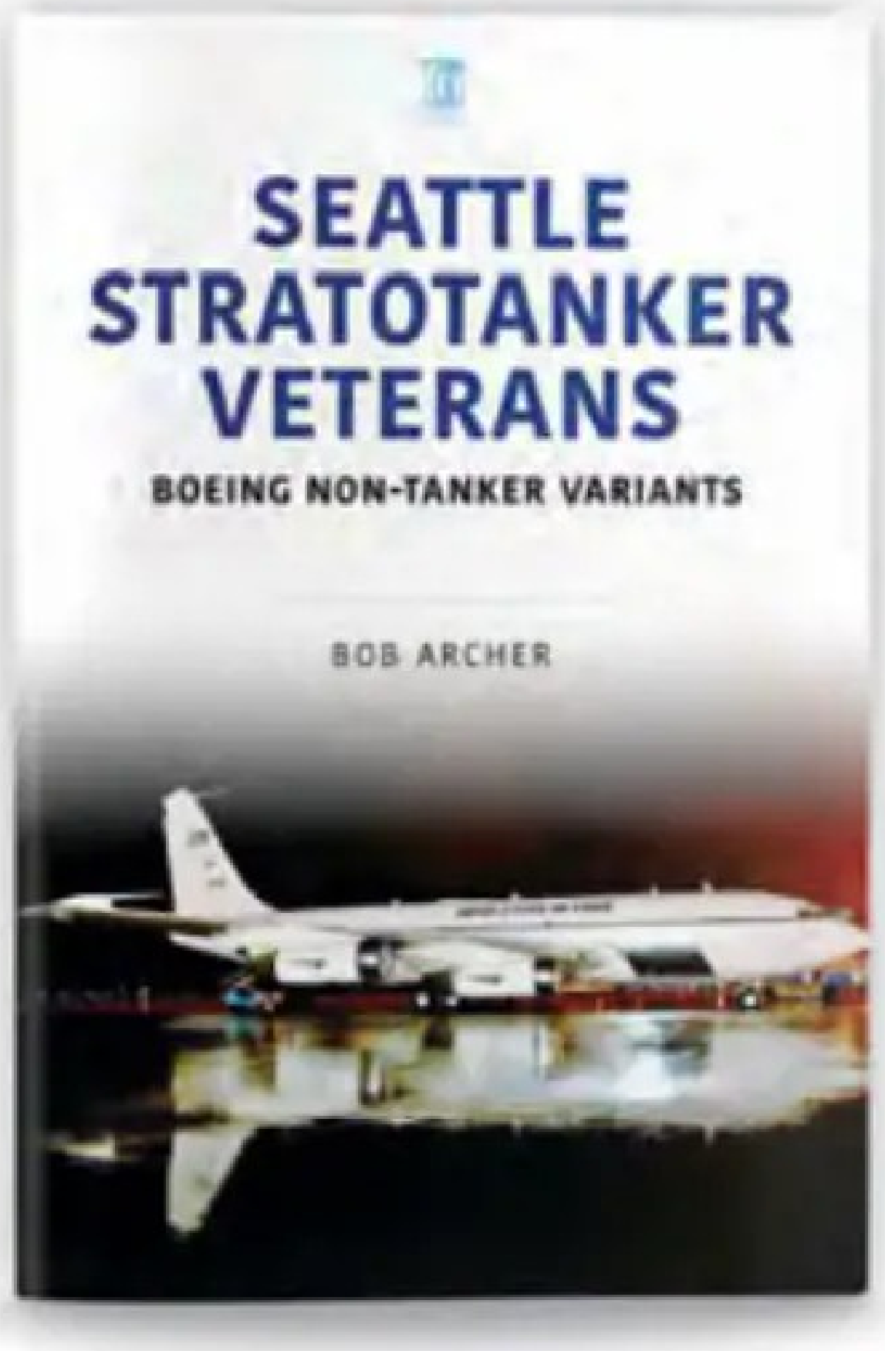

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Flying high with SkyAlps

▲ De Havilland Canada Dash 8-400, 9H-BEL (c/n 4230), above the Dolomites SKYALPS/ ZULUPICTURES

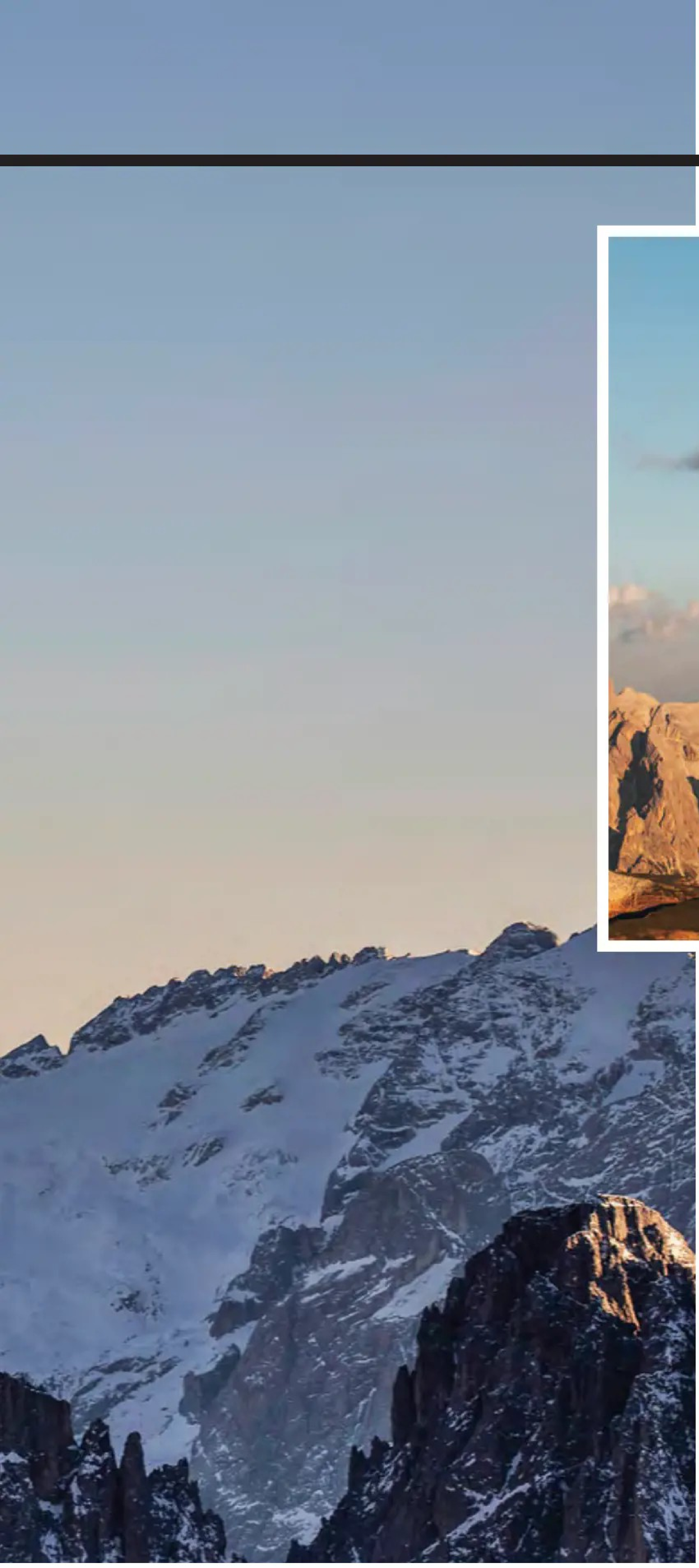
Robert Veitch flies to Bolzano with Italian boutique airline SkyAlps, to learn more about the carrier with sustainability, service and distinctiveness at the heart of its operations

Located in South Tyrol in the Italian Alps at an elevation of approximately 800ft, with a population of 106,500, Bolzano is a bridge between northern and southern Europe, where Italian and German are the primary languages, along with the minority Ladin. It is a meeting point of cultures and a gateway to the Dolomites, a focal point for wine lovers, hikers, climbers and skiers. The railway is on the Verona to Innsbruck line, a main artery connecting Italy with Austria via the Brenner Pass.

Bolzano is serviced by SkyAlps, an airline founded in 2021 by the Gostner family that also runs FRI-EL Green Power, and currently connects more than 20 European cities with direct flights. Beneath the big jet contrails up above, the carrier is aiming to edge closer to more sustainable aviation.

Speaking with *Aviation News*, Maximilian Alber, head of sales and marketing at SkyAlps, said: “FRI-EL Green Power is an Italian group of companies mainly focusing on the production of renewable energy. Founded in 1994, by the Gostner family, it is a leader in the field of green energy, primarily focusing on wind, biomass and biogas power generation. The company is committed to sustainability and environmental responsibility, working to reduce CO_2 emissions and contributing to energy transition.”

The maiden flights of SkyAlps departed from Bolzano to Olbia in Sardinia and the Spanish island of Ibiza on June 17, 2021, operated by De Havilland Canada Dash 8-400s; 9H-BEL (c/n 4230) along with 9H-EVA (c/n 4237). Berlin/Brandenberg was added to the scheduled flight network before the end of the



▲ The SkyAlps aircraft wear a green or blue livery
SKYALPS/ZULUPICTURES

first month and two more of the turboprops arrived in 2022, 9H-ALE (c/n 4326) and 9H-PET (c/n 4104).

On January 16, 2023, the airline gained its Air Operator Certificate (AOC) and Air Transport Operating Licence (ATOL), from the Italian Civil Aviation Authority (ENAC), to become Italy's fifth airline. Gostner said at the time: "The issuance of the AOC represents a historic moment for us."

Previously the airline had relied on the Maltese carrier Luxwing, but the AOC acquisition offered a better future, as Alber noted: "Since obtaining our own AOC and ATOL, SkyAlps has gained more independence and flexibility in its operations. This certification has not only solidified our status as an independent airline, but also opened up opportunities for expansion and partnerships. With the AOC in place, we are now in a stronger position to meet interline and codeshare agreements with other companies, a goal we are working hard to achieve."

Another six aircraft arrived in 2023, although four of those remain in storage, and two more arrived this year, to take the active fleet to eight aircraft.

The airline intends to expand beyond ten airframes by next summer, with the entire fleet comprising 76-seat Dash 8-400s. Using 2.3 litres of fuel per passenger per 100km flown, the airline states they save up to 50% in emissions compared to other regional aircraft and produce less noise during take-off and landing. The goal is to maximise carbon footprint reduction and promote innovation to shape the future of the aviation industry. In September 2023, SkyAlps operated its first flight with sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) and intends to increase SAF use wherever possible.

The aircraft

Although the average age of the SkyAlps fleet is more than 16 years, the airline believes the aircraft have a long future ahead of them. Alber said: "Opting for the Dash 8-400 was definitely the right decision for us, as it is a highly efficient aircraft that saves up to 50% in emissions compared to regional jets and are [less likely to produce] contrails, which reduces its climate impact."

Together with Tamarack Aerospace, a US-based aviation technology company, the airline said it is aiming to develop the most efficient, silent and sustainable regional aircraft in the world. It has signed a letter of intent with the US firm to upgrade the fleet with Eco-SMARTWING active winglet technology, to improve performance while significantly reducing emissions and noise pollution. Alber said: "The winglets have not been applied yet, so this is still a pilot project for the future." With around 400 Dash

▼ Dash 8, 9H-EVA (c/n 4237), at sunset in Bolzano
SKYALPS/ZULUPICTURES

skyalps
201

8 airframes still operating, the move could have ramifications far beyond the SkyAlps fleet.

Active winglets aside, the airline is keen to go further, according to Alber: “SkyAlps aims at increasing the use of SAF in the years ahead. Moreover, the bigger goal is stepping into innovative partnerships to actively shape the future of the aviation industry.”

The airline

Though a young operator, Alber said the SkyAlps network is performing: “Popularity of routes is subject to seasonality. In summer our customers really enjoy popular sea destinations both in Italy and abroad, such as Corfu, Ibiza and Olbia. During winter we welcome many winter sport enthusiasts from Copenhagen and Antwerp on board. Among the connections we offer all year round, Germany and the UK always show satisfying results.

“We have routes that work great as seasonal options, for example those between Bolzano and southern Europe, offering direct flights to popular sea destinations like Croatia and Greece, or those aimed at ambitious winter sports enthusiasts in Denmark, for example, offering direct flights to the Dolomites in the colder season. Nonetheless, we strongly believe in year-round routes like those between Germany (Berlin, Hamburg, Düsseldorf) and Bolzano and those between London and Bolzano, as we see that the offer is interesting both in the high and low season and matches the tourism development we see in our region.”

The airline flies a mix of there-and-back and triangular sectors, which Alber suggested will evolve over time: “It’s a question of finding the best way to answer to the market’s possibilities and optimise our offer. If we see a growth in demand for specific destinations, we will plan more ‘there-and-back’ routes. Whereas should there be new partnerships or particular demands from passengers, we do not exclude the possibility of adding more triangular routes.”

Previously, Gostner has hinted at operating routes on behalf of Lufthansa and Austrian Airlines, though Alber was a little more reticent: “We’re eager to establish positive, productive collaborations with main players to make sure the overall offer gets optimised continuously and allows our passengers to enjoy an even better travel experience.”

The airline signed a Public Service Obligation agreement on September 27, to base a Dash 8 at Mostar from May 2025, and operate services from there to five Italian cities and three other destinations. The Italian emphasis arose because religious pilgrims make up the largest portion of Mostar’s visitors. At the announcement, Spinato, general director aviation and operations said: “Mostar and its surroundings are among the smallest regions, but with enormous potential. That is why we decided to make Mostar our second base; I’m confident this co-operation will continue for a long time.”

So far so good

The airline aims to be distinctive from other Italian airlines, asserted Alber: “We want to offer a different product, reflecting our strategic position in the northernmost region of Italy and the aircraft type we are operating. By taking over and focusing on short- to medium-haul regional flights that no other airline offers, we’re entering a very important niche market. We don’t focus on our competitors – we are completely devoted to constantly improving our service and network in order to ensure important flight connections within Europe, also by establishing positive, productive collaborations.”

The complimentary in-flight service for all passengers is another area where the airline displays recognisable separation from other carriers: “We don’t want to simply take our passengers from one place to the other, we want to make the flight part of the travel experience, transforming what is usually perceived as wasted time into a pleasant, unique occurrence. Moreover, as we come from South Tyrol, we wanted to give a taste of our land to all passengers, creating a delightful anticipation in the tourists visiting the Dolomites and a homely

▼ **SkyAlps currently connects more than 20 European cities with direct flights** SKYALPS/ ZULUPICTURES

▲ Dash 8, 9H-SOP (c/n 4242), outside the hangar in Bolzano SKYALPS/ ZULUPICTURES

feeling in the locals flying from Bolzano. The feedback regarding our on-board service has been extremely positive. Our passengers really enjoy the service and appreciate the exclusive monthly wine list, as well as the entertainment gadgets we offer for children."

The airline transferred UK operations from Stansted to Gatwick on April 17, and Gostner said at the time: "With this short cut to the Dolomites we make sure travellers get the most out of their holiday, cutting transfer times almost in half."

The new route is showing good results, according to Alber: "We are still working on developing brand awareness in the UK market. Our connection to Gatwick is appreciated both by people living in the London area, as well as by South Tyroleans wanting to visit the city. Destinations such as Birmingham or Manchester could be included in the future, as long as we find the right partner to establish those routes." So what is it like to fly?

Come fly with me

Arriving at Gatwick 1hr 45 mins before departure, the author discovered he was the last passenger to check-in for SkyAlps flight BQ1933 to Bolzano. Ground staff noted: "Everyone who flies with them seems very on time and organised. They're popular with staff and passengers here. There were only three people on the first flight, but it's been building and building."

The five-step skip into 9H-PAUL (one of four in the fleet to wear the green livery) is met with a convivial welcome from the cabin crew. Inside, it's decked out with royal blue carpet, battleship-blue leather seats, pea-green antimacassars adorned with the airline logo and dark mauve seat belts to finish things off. The thick paper of the in-flight magazine is reminiscent of bygone days, an 88-page love letter extolling the charms of the South Tyrol region.

Turboprops have become something of a rarity at Gatwick in recent years, with SkyAlps the only airline currently operating the Dash 8 at the Sussex facility. The propellers began to spin and the block tackle was removed, with the aircraft off stand just a few minutes late at 1601hrs. Queueing for runway 26L, 9H-PAUL felt petite compared to the big jets awaiting their turn to charge down the tarmac. With the fuselage close to the ground, the pebble beach in the concrete was clearly visible, a refreshing but slightly incongruous feeling compared to normal. Turning gently onto the runway, the engines span up to full power and generated a reverberating, pulsating throb in the cabin.

The lift from a Dash 8 rarely fails to position your stomach a fraction closer to the throat and, by the far end of 26L, the aircraft was so high that sheep in the adjacent fields looked more like dots of cotton wool. The aircraft offers a proper flying experience – a twin prop adventure – and, on the climb to cruise altitude, the bearing led across the flatlands of eastern Kent, past Dungeness and out into the English Channel, spanning the firmament between England and France. Routing southeast over Brussels at 25,000ft and 425mph towards the northern tip of Luxembourg, the in-flight service began. The reassuring clink of glass harked back to how things used to be – not only was there a choice between red or white wine, but this grape or that; a snack, plus another drink of choice. None of it rushed, all very courteous and included in the ticket price.

The aircraft turned south close to Ansbach, routing approximately 170° over Augsburg and Innsbruck, as the first phase of sunset witnessed the sky exude soft shades of amber and warm toffee. As the sun began to slip over the horizon, the Austrian Alps appeared ahead, an unfolding panorama of summits flecked with snow and guarded by pockets of small clouds on sentry duty. At this altitude, the contours, ruggedness and sharpened ridges of the mountains were evident and all the more impressive.

Descent was initiated around 40 miles north of Bolzano, passing directly over the airfield, bearing towards Trento some 35-40 miles to the south, before rotating 180° at an altitude of around 9,000ft and dropping into Val d'Adige for final approach. As sunset ebbed into night, the pilots eased the aircraft between the peaks, weaving subtly along

▼ The first phase of sunset saw the sky exude shades of amber and toffee KEY-ROBERT VEITCH

▲ In the flight deck with captain Cesare Monnazzi and first officer Fabian Salcher KEY-ROBERT VEITCH

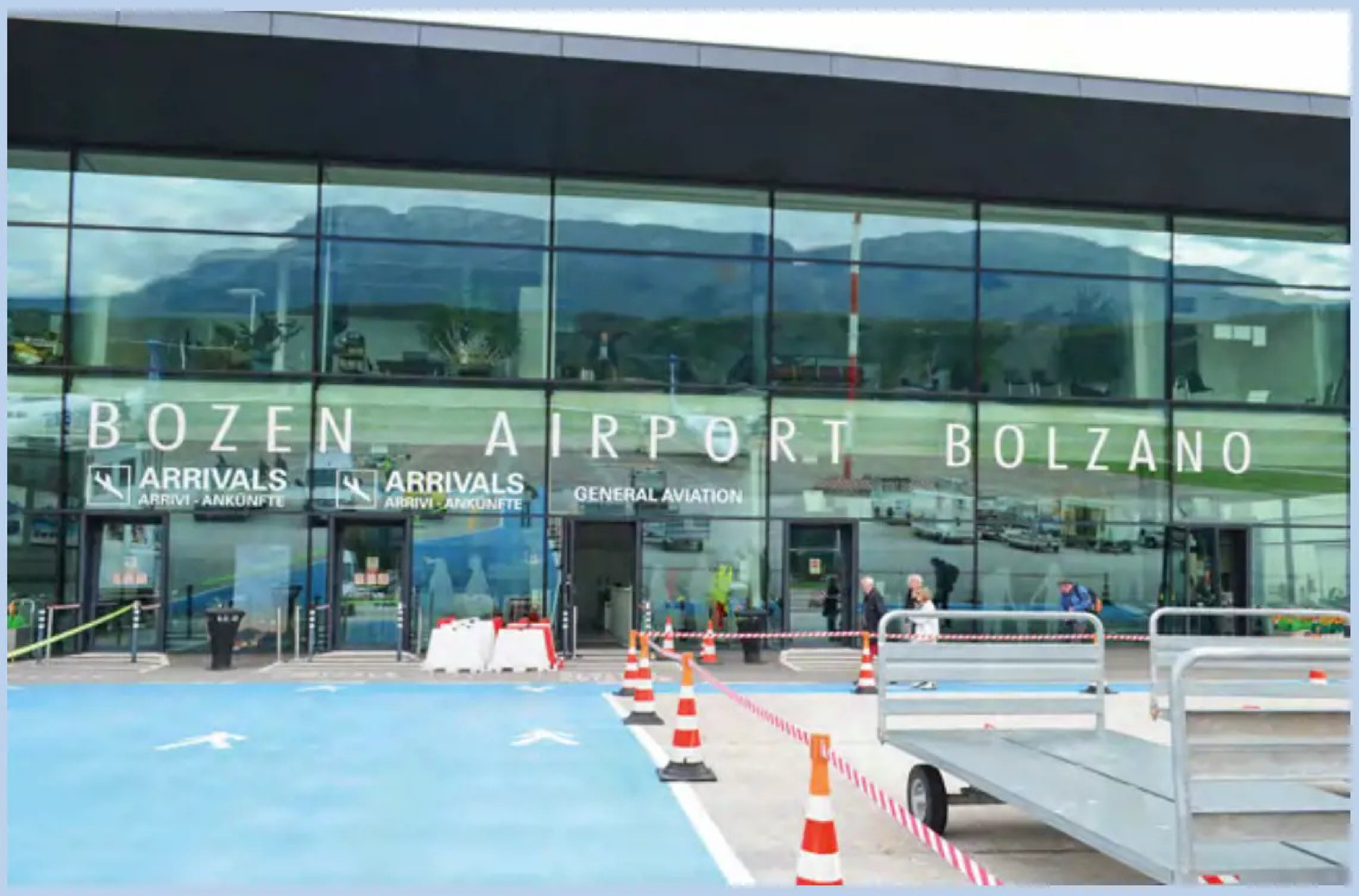
the valley. After 615 miles and 2hrs and 4mins, 9H-PAUL touched down smoothly on runway 01, just nine minutes behind schedule at 1904hrs.

Up front in the cockpit, captain Cesare Monnazzi and first officer Fabian Salcher had time for a few words with the author. Monnazzi described the final approach as: “Quite strict, we have to pass between the middle of the mountains. It’s all GPS-led, but very difficult in the dark. I have 25 years flying experience, and this is more fun than jets. It keeps us from getting rusty.”

When it came to flying the Dash 8, Salcher noted: “For its size, it’s a very powerful aircraft.”

The airport

Bolzano Airport is located on Via Aeroporto Franceso Barracca, a somewhat anonymous road. A little further along from the functional airport building, beyond the parking area, are rows of solar panels and apple trees in the space between the airfield and the railway line. To improve connectivity, a new station, San Giacomo, is under construction beside the airport, which when complete will offer a five-minute rail link to the city centre.



▼ Bolzano Airport handled 66,179 passengers in 2022, rising to 83,668 in 2023 KEY-ROBERT VEITCH

The airport was opened in 1926 and was purchased for €3.8m in 2019 by ABD Holdings, who extended runway 01/19 from 4,300ft to 4,797ft in late 2021 to enable the handling of larger aircraft. Alber pointed out: “Extending helped to provide more security and higher operational reliability for our service. Further extensions are not planned at the moment.”

The facility handled 66,179 passengers in 2022, rising to 83,668 in 2023, but Alber said there are no plans to expand: “We are growing and we will continue to do so, but we keep in our minds the size of the region. For sure, some work to adapt the services and sizes needs to be done, but we are very proud of the fact that our hub is compact and easy to go around, ensuring a relaxed travel experience. That’s why we are not aiming at a massive expansion or renovation.”

Other operators have failed to make Bolzano work in the past, but Alber remains confident: “SkyAlps has the advantage of operating flights with smaller machines, making it easier to get to a positive load factor on each flight, and is trying to offer connections that can be interesting both for locals and for tourists. Moreover, we’re focusing on routes that other airlines don’t offer and thus have an important USP.” He said the airport is not actively pursuing other airlines to use the facility, but it is looking into expanding the SkyAlps network and partnerships with other airports.

The concourse has four check-in desks, along with car hire and an information desk, while upstairs there’s a sparsely appointed lounge offering views of the apron. Aside from ramp movements, the highlight is the delightful Carrettai Fly bistro where the decor is positively alpine and the coffee undoubtedly uplifting. Two security lines lead to Gate 1 and Gate 2 beyond passport control, both offering unobstructed views of the aircraft and the western slopes of the Val d’Adige. When it comes to visiting

BZO
AIRPORT
SÜDTIROL ALTO ADIGE
ENTRANCE
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KELLER
KELLER
GOLL

▶ The entrance to the airport is fairly modest KEY-ROBERT VEITCH

Flight BQ1932 to Gatwick was called and boarding was a pleasant amble across the apron KEY-ROBERT VEITCH

SkyAlps fleet	Aircraft	c/n	Manufactured	Arrived
9H-ALE	De Havilland Canada DHC-8-402Q Dash 8	4326	07/2010	01/06/2022
9H-BEL	De Havilland Canada DHC-8-402Q Dash 8	4230	01/2009	16/06/2021
9H-EVA	De Havilland Canada DHC-8-402Q Dash 8	4237	01/2009	14/06/2021
9H-MATI	De Havilland Canada DHC-8-402Q Dash 8	4157	02/2007	12/04/2024
9H-MAYA	De Havilland Canada DHC-8-402Q Dash 8	4248	02/2009	08/05/2024
9H-PAUL	De Havilland Canada DHC-8-402Q Dash 8	4255	03/2009	05/09/2023
9H-PET	De Havilland Canada DHC-8-402Q Dash 8	4104	01/2005	27/07/2022
9H-SOP	De Havilland Canada DHC-8-402Q Dash 8	4242	01/2009	12/06/2023
OE-IMP	De Havilland Canada DHC-8-402Q Dash 8	4234	09/2008	24/08/2023
OE-IMQ	De Havilland Canada DHC-8-402Q Dash 8	4239	01/2009	24/08/2023
OE-IMR	De Havilland Canada DHC-8-402Q Dash 8	4245	03/2009	24/08/2023
OE-IMT	De Havilland Canada DHC-8-402Q Dash 8	4250	03/2009	24/08/2023

Bolzano and this region of the Alps, Alber said: “SkyAlps represents the fastest and most efficient way of reaching the Italian Alps and the Dolomites. It also provides a unique view of the landscape when departing or approaching Bolzano Airport.”

Arrivederci Bolzano

Looking a decade ahead, Alber said Gostner and Spinato’s vision for SkyAlps is “to become more recognised and overall trusted as a brand. The company wants to continue to grow, in terms of network, fleet and partnerships. We should rely on quality rather than quantity, as the entire business is based on this. The focus is to offer a ‘glory days of the past’ experience on strategic regional routes, connecting smaller airports to attractive travel destinations and international hubs. Moreover, we are also keen on expanding our charter activities all over Europe.”

Flight BQ1932 back to Gatwick was called and boarding was a pleasant amble across the apron to Dash 8, 9H-BEL (c/n 4230), the aircraft the airline began operations with. There’s no queuing, just five steps and another friendly welcome on board. Departure from runway 19 was on time, and the climb out proved impressive, ascending along the Val d’Adige in daylight. At around 14,000ft over Mezzocorona, 25-30 miles south of the airport, the flight crew turned 9H-BEL through 180° and began the climb to cruising altitude and peak groundspeed of around 390mph, into a slight headwind. Across the Alps and bound for England, the mountains may have receded into the background but the memories of flying the high Alps with SkyAlps would linger far longer.

The climb out proved impressive, ascending along the Val d’Adige in daylight hours KEY-ROBERT VEITCH

Next Month

Filip Modrzejewski

Aviation News

A new lease of life

Babak Taghvaee explains the history and future fate of the Thai A340 fleet. We dive in to what the quad-jets replaced all those years ago and what replaced them in service with the Thai carrier

Ryanair's ambition

Thomas Haynes investigates the ambitious plan of Ryanair to upgrade its fleet to carry 300 million passengers a year by 2034

Keeping a tradition

Filip Modrzejewski visits White-Red Wings Foundation and Polish Foundation Squadron to fly with the some beautiful ex-Polish Air Force assets

Firefighting helos down under

Aviation News visits Sydney Helicopter Group, a company that flies a mixed fleet of firefighting helicopters to keep the people of New South Wales, Australia, safe in the event of large bush fires or flooding

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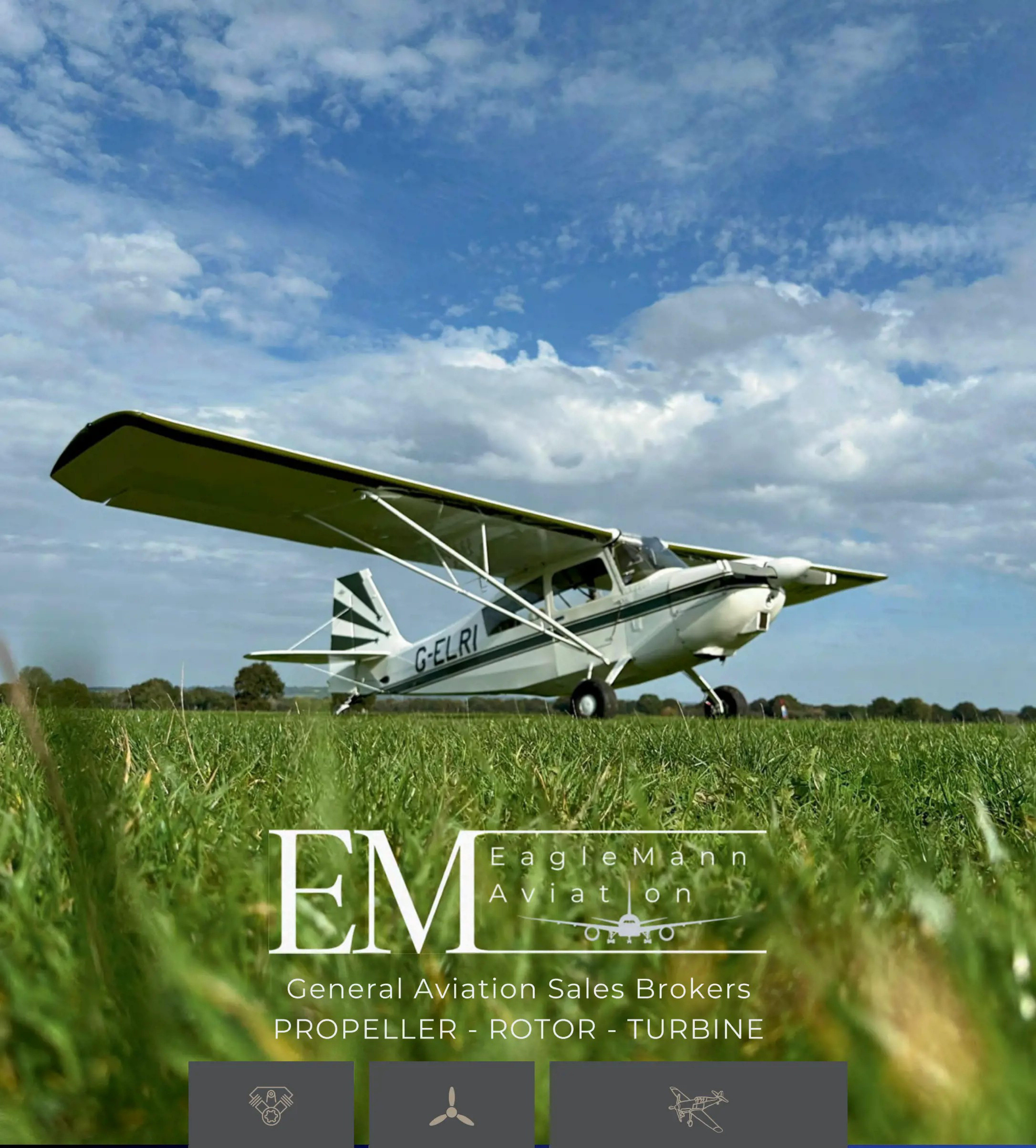

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